HOOKED on Chess

A Memoir

"A life driven by an all-consuming passion for art, chess and gambling." – Lubosh Kavalek

Bill Hook

NEW IN CHESS

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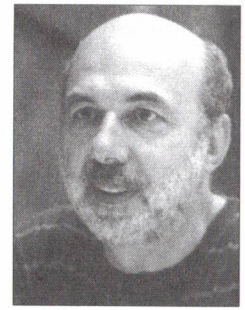
Foreword



Meeting Bill Hook – an unassuming, friendly man – one would not suspect that his life was driven by an all-consuming passion for art, chess and gambling. Sometimes singly, sometimes in combination, often blending all three.

Bill's book spans a good part of the last century and gives us a glimpse into the scene in and around the New York chess clubs of the 1950's, describing the various personalities and the atmosphere with wit and humor. The vignettes include chess encounters with an array of players, from down-and-out homeless souls to the likes of Stanley Kubrick, Marcel Duchamp, and of course, Bobby Fischer.

From the inauspicious beginning, Bill's chess career developed into a life-long pursuit. Bill competed in 16 chess Olympiads, playing mostly on the top board for the British Virgin Islands. In 1980 he won the gold medal for the best overall individual performance and the position from his final game appeared on an official British Virgin Islands postage stamp.

As an artist he captured chess life and chess players – from street hustlers to world champions – in his early paintings and in countless photographs.

The book is a valuable record of a slice of chess life in the US and on the international scene and is written by someone with a great love of the royal game and an abiding sense of fair-play. A good read, a colorful document, and an admirable life.

Lubosh Kavalek
December 2007

Acknowledgements

My dear wife Mimi was indispensable to this book. She prodded me when it was needed and put things into a more sensible perspective when I went off into mind warp.

Lubosh Kavalek filled in many gaps in my partial knowledge of chess events.

Feedback is welcome. Email: billhook25@yahoo.com

The Flea House

My Finnish parents were domestic servants who, along with five others, worked for a family named Berkson in New Rochelle, a wealthy suburb of New York. The three Berksons lived in a 30-room house on three acres, and we lived in a separate house over a three-car garage. No playmates were available during my early years but my childhood was otherwise quite normal save for two singular incidents.

The Berksons owned four German boxers who lived in a kennel. At age six I used to take Max around the grounds on a leash and one day had stopped to sit on a beach chair, putting the looped end of the leash under a chair leg. A neighbor's small dog wandered onto our lawn, and both animals stiffened with alertness when they saw each other. Reacting to the excitement of the encounter, I foolishly urged Max, 'Sic him, sic him!' At that, Max broke loose, upsetting the chair and tearing after the other dog who turned tail and scampered back home. I ran after them, calling out Max's name in vain. Looking through a thin hedge I saw that Max's jaw was fastened on the other dog's throat and several neighbors were milling around helplessly. Then a young man came with a .22 rifle and put a bullet into Max's shoulder, without apparent effect. His next shot killed Max, and I ran home screaming.

There was a court case whose settlement I don't recall, but I do clearly remember being called into the judge's chamber to testify there because of my age, and I recounted everything as written above except for 'Sic him, sic him!'

At age 7 in 1932, my mother and I went to Finland via the S.S. Gripsholm, for her first family visit in many years. In mid ocean a little girl my age appeared, and with our mothers' approval we went off to explore the ship. After a couple of hours we had not returned and our mothers expressed their concern to a ship's officer. When we were still missing a little later, the captain ordered his crew to search the ship. We were not found, and the captain then ordered the ship to be turned around (presumably to find our bodies) and searched again.

This time an officer found us. The girl and I had discovered an empty stateroom, and just as any exploratory kids would do, we crammed ourselves into a small closet and closed the door, which locked. By the time the officer opened the door we were drenched with perspiration and of course, crying. I retain a clear image of being brought to the captain and our distraught mothers.

I had pneumonia twice as a child, which presumably weakened my lungs and would affect my future life.

At age 14 my parents separated and I acquired an unwelcome stepfather.

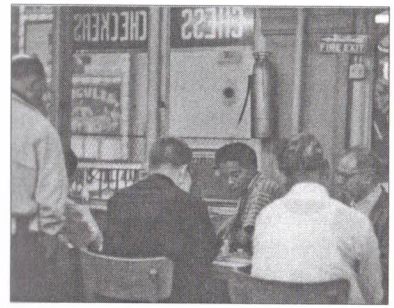
When 15, three of us kids went to a buddy's home where he taught us the game of chess. There ensued a series of wintry afternoons of tandem games, but it was no big thing, when baseball weather arrived we left chess behind.

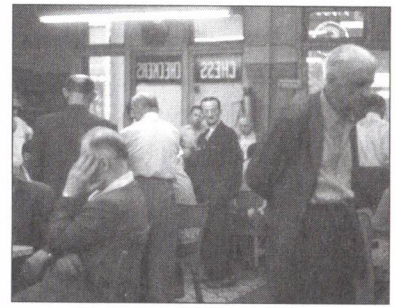
In 1942 my 49-year-old father died.

At age 18 in 1943, I had a pre-induction army physical in New York, as did countless thousands of other young men subject to the draft. At the end of the 4-hour ordeal a note sent me back to X-Ray, where they told me that I had tuberculosis. So instead of going off to fight World War II, I spent the next 15 months in a hospital in Westchester County, New York. Hacking coughs echoed down the corridors, and the shrieks and cries of the mentally ill emanated from a nearby building. The recommended treatment for TB in those days was strict bed rest, and so I used a bed pan for six months and then had very shaky legs when they finally let me walk down the hall a little. With gradually increased ambulatory privileges, I found a lot going on that I hadn't been aware of. The hospitals were seriously understaffed because of the war, and the mobile patients were unattended to except for infrequent rounds by the doctors. The night nurse had responsibility for 80 patients. There was a bookie who took bets in his room, an ongoing poker game after hours, and sexual services could be obtained on the women's floor for 50¢. I tried the poker, and outdoor walks helped pass time, but I overdid the ambulatory privilege by taking transit to New York to see some baseball games. Then a library cart brought a copy of the huge Gossip's Chess Manual, and I immersed myself in a game that I had known only casually. I pestered fellow patients for games, and later I answered a *New York Times* ad to subscribe to *Chess Review* magazine and play the game by mail. The magazine was a revelation to me. I had known nothing about the organized chess world, and now I was reading vivid accounts of the US Championship (with photos) and international events as well. A later issue described a colorful club just off Times Square in Manhattan. I had never been to *any* chess club, so when the doctors finally discharged me in September 1944, I was eager to go to 42nd Street and see what this game was really like.

It so happened that I could not have chosen a more atypical club for my first experience. Amidst the bright lights of movie theaters, near Hubert's museum and flea circus, and above a garish fast food eatery there were some large windows. Painted signs on the glass read 'The New York Academy of Chess and Checkers', 'Games Arranged', '10¢ per hour'. I climbed a narrow stairway and found myself in a long dingy room crowded with men, and

thick with smoke. A few checker players were in the back, but most of the games being played were chess, and there were a fair number of onlookers. I joined a group of men clustered around one game and found a taut struggle going on. One player was very well dressed, a worldly man exuding confidence and capability. The other, whom I later came to know as Benny Fine (not Reuben Fine), played with a sharply vigilant intensity, perched forward on his seat. They arrived at a bishop versus knight endgame, and by a series of beautiful maneuvers, which even my young chess mind could appreciate, Benny's centralized knight cut off the bishop's escape squares, and resignation soon followed. As money changed hands, Benny looked up with glistening eyes and a broad smile and said proudly, 'I trapped his bishop!' I was enthralled. A little later I hesitantly asked an old Russian for a game, and after a while he said to his friend, 'The young man doesn't play badly.' I beamed. I was to spend much of my next 25 years here.





Two views of the 42nd Street club. Movie Marquees are shown in left photo.

The New York Academy of Chess and Checkers had been opened a few years before by a Canadian Checkers champion named Harold Fisher, and so it came to be known as 'Fisher's'. He was a genial, bald, stoop-shouldered man, and well liked. Fred and Willie helped him run the place. Fred was his brother-in-law, whose bulk, broken nose and rolling gait made him seem like a former club-level boxer, which he may well have been. Willie was tall, thin, had thick glasses, and always wore a cap, suspenders, and a tie-less colorful shirt. He had twinkling eyes, a ready smile, and a very soft voice, but he rarely initiated a conversation.

Fisher's was always well patronized; it was consistently crowded, even during the war years when few men of military age were around. The informality of the place was an appealing factor; the 'club' had no membership and anyone could walk in and play for a modest fee, or just watch if they so chose, no sales pressure was ever applied. And somehow that worked! Of

course the club's prime location brought many people to the area. The transportation lines converged on a district densely packed with fine restaurants, theaters including the Metropolitan Opera House just two blocks away, cinemas and countless stores and offices.

Two major contributors to Fisher's clientele were the nearby garment industry and jewelry trade districts. These businesses were traditionally practiced by Jews, stemming from olden days in Europe when other professions were closed off to them. With their natural predilection to chess, Fisher's attracted many Jews, who thereby contributed to the club's cultural enrichment. Yiddish was often spoken, and over the years I picked up a lot of words and phrases. An onlooker was called a kibitzer, for instance, and a poor player was a patzer. I actually got to the point where I invoked the opening phrase of the Kaddish (prayer for the dead) when my opponent had a busted position. Lest this seem like bad manners to you, it was in keeping with the tradition of 'coffee house chess', as I came to learn. (Yes, coffee was available.)

Kibitzing in all its forms was developed to a high art here. Some kibitzers were stoically quiet, even immobile, others agonized dramatically or squirmed obtrusively. One man nodded his head vigorously over every single move, no matter how brilliant or atrocious.

It was common practice to gently needle one's opponents, often by belittling or overpraising their moves. Some more obnoxious players blew smoke in the other's face. There were those who were talkative but not aggressive, they simply spewed out a constant stream of jokes, rhymes or nonsense. Some of these players were hilariously witty, and they prided themselves on being able to produce sparkling lines while coping with complex positions.

The most gifted of the players at Fisher's was undoubtedly George Treysman, a horse-playing waiter who once finished third in a US Championship. He was thin, high-browed, had prominent cheekbones and very expressive hands which embellished his colorful speech. George was the supreme coffee house player, tremendously strong with a devastating gift of gab, so his opponents were crushed two ways.

He could be the icy executioner, as when he was two pawns ahead and making a move which eliminated all hope of counterplay, he said, 'I'm afraid you have lost too much blood, my friend', delivering the line with sinister gravity. But Treysman also had a sardonic sense of humor. At a critical junction in one game his opponent moved, and George sat up as if stunned. He peered closely at the board, looked up and said, 'You made this move?' The flustered man nodded, and Treysman looked around at the kibitzers, feigning amazement. He reached his hand across the table, and as his opponent

grasped it, George said, 'Give up chess', and laughed uproariously as he made a killing rejoinder.

Treysman enjoyed playing to the gallery, but he was a serious chess professional. I once lost a series of games to him, thinking that at 25¢ a game, the experience was well worth it. But George was convinced that the stakes were 50¢, and after the misunderstanding surfaced at the end of the session, he wouldn't speak to me for about a year afterward. 25¢ and 50¢ are trivial sums today, but in the 1950's 50¢ was worth about $3.75 in 2006 values, and in any event few of Fisher's patrons were wealthy, so these were meaningful sums there at that time.

Most of the customers played for the pleasure, or for small stakes, but many others enjoyed gambling as well, and were ready to risk sizeable amounts on a game. Accordingly, there were a number of pros, or semi-pros, who would prey on the weaker gamblers, and cultivate a stable of regular customers for themselves. Aside from the game itself, the pros would ply their victims with appropriate psychological blandishments, to prolong the relationship as long as possible. And a certain code of behavior existed, in that there was generally no overt competition for a 'fish' when he walked in. (After all, chess is a gentleman's game!)

Of course, various disparities of skill existed between the hustler and the fish, and several methods of odds-giving were employed. Straight money odds were sometimes used, but more frequently it was material odds, such as pawn and move, pawn and 2 moves, knight against a pawn, full knight, or queen against a knight and moves (2 to 6). The skilled hustler would set the odds at a level in which the fish would be able to win an occasional game, but no more. On one occasion the better player removed both of his knights, and still won. The patzer then insisted that one knight be put back on the board, because the odds giver was gaining too much space!

During my first year at 42nd Street, a man named Sam Richman made a singular impression upon me. He was perhaps 35 at the time, tall, had a thick head of black hair, and one eye had an ominous black spot in the corner, which belied his essentially gentle nature. I later learned that Sam had been married and owned a delicatessen in Brooklyn in the 1930's. A strong player, he plunged into a series of increasingly high stake games with George Treysman, lost his delicatessen, and then his wife left him. His life in ruins because of chess miscalculations, he then chose to become a chess hustler for the rest of his life!

I observed Sam for almost 30 years on 42nd Street, often giving odds that were too generous. The erect, imposing man with black hair gradually changed; his hair grayed, his posture stooped, he limped, and when he lost

some teeth his face became a sunken caricature of his former noble features. A sad chess tale, but surely a mere variant of our own deterioration if we survive long enough. The more important things to consider with Sam Richman, is that he was an honorable, talented, good person who was well liked, and thereby thrived in his own way during his many years on 42nd Street.

My early explorations of the chess world were made via a commuter train from New Rochelle. Since my hospital discharge in 1944 I had been living in a small apartment with my mother and her new husband, a disagreeable arrangement.

One day a man came to our door, said he was from the New York Bureau of Rehabilitation, and that because of my T.B. the state was offering to pay for advanced training in a field of my choice. This was wonderful news, as we had no funds for this purpose. I chose to study fine art, but since this was unlikely to result in a reliable income, the state diverted me to commercial art instead. Pratt Institute in Brooklyn was an excellent school and they prepared their students well for the business world by incessantly throwing projects at us with tight deadlines. I didn't have the motivation to work that intensely in an art that had limited scope for personal creativity, and so I did not complete my final assignments, thereby flunking.

Throughout the school year I lived in Brooklyn and returned to New Rochelle on weekends, spending some time at Fisher's en route. While I was at home that spring my mother died suddenly in her sleep, at the age of 45.

After the burial, my stepfather and I quickly separated and I went off to Detroit to live with an aunt and uncle. The change of scene was refreshing; leaving angst behind, here was a new city to explore at the age of 20. I discovered burlesque, found the local chess club, took a drawing course at Wayne University, got a job at Hudson's department store, and met and dated a nice girl. Also, I sneaked a camera past the guards at the massive River Rouge factory and took surreptitious photos of the buildings and machinery, which I found aesthetically intriguing. Not really a good idea, as the plant had recently been in war production, and there was still stringent security, but then what is youth for but to do foolish things?

In the meantime I was on a waiting list for classes at the Art Students League, back in New York, which had a mostly fine-arts orientation. After half a year, an opening became available, so I headed back to the big city.

My first class consisted of painting from the model for five evenings per week with each pose lasting a total of 30 or 45 hours. The instructor, Robert Brackman, would come in twice a week and give each student individual attention. Brackman's work blended colors in the manner of Cézanne but carried subjects further to a more definitive depiction. Life magazine had given

him some favorable coverage, so Brackman's reputation was at its zenith. His pupils devotedly adopted his methodology, (myself included) and our paintings became easily recognizable to other students as works of Brackman disciples. At that time our instructor was able to impart to us his zeal and sound principles and I found his lessons to be of great value. But later, after I left him for more adventurous teachers, Brackman locked himself into the style that had served him so well and his work deadened and became formulaic. He had lost the creative spark.

Upon arriving from Detroit I had gotten brief jobs at two department stores and a silk screen factory. Then in 1947 I got a full time job in a bakery, sometimes kneading dough but mostly removing pies which came out of an oven on a long slow-moving conveyer belt twelve abreast. Armed with 2-pie prongs, there were occasions when I didn't move fast enough, and some of the pastries splattered onto the floor. My bakery work began at 6 a.m.; in mid-afternoon I would walk 11 blocks to Fisher's, then came the painting class from 7 'til 10 and often I went back to Fisher's after class. A rugged schedule, with not much time for sleep.

After the war ended, a younger clientele started coming to Fisher's, and some military men came back. The returning soldier I remember best was Harry Baker, who had played in the 1942 US Championship and had spent much of the war in Italy. He received a warm welcome from many of the players, and until he settled back in civilian life he often came to Fisher's wearing his decorated uniform and relating some of his war experiences. He seemed gruff at the time, but I came to know him as a warm, sensitive person who was a fine player. Some years later he showed up at the club in the afternoon (unusual for him), and after playing a bit he said emotionally, 'I lost something today that was a lot more valuable than a game.' Undoubtedly he referred to a personal tragedy, and was seeking solace in chess. I could relate to that, since I had quickly gone out to play baseball when my mother died.

During the 40's and 50's, there were very few chess clocks around, so those of us who preferred a faster version of the game played 10-second chess, which was also called 'rapid transit'. Three people got together and played a 'pot', in which the winner stayed on, and if he won twice in a row, the others would pay him a quarter, and the next pot would begin. We had no timers, so after a move was made the odd man out would wait an estimated 6 seconds, and then count at one-second intervals, 'One, two, three, MOVE!' It was certainly cumbersome, but that was what we did, and we loved the game.

Both the Manhattan and Marshall chess clubs held weekly rapid transit tournaments, using metronomes as timers. It was great to go and play against the star-studded fields there on those nights, but the clubs were dead during the rest of the week. Fisher's was where the action was, and a number of the top clubs' players came to play pots on 42nd Street. Notable among these was Max Pavey, Manhattan Chess Club champion and a high scorer in US Championships. An immigrant from Scotland and a perfect gentleman, Max was always ready with a compliment whenever his opponent triumphed.

Other strong pot players from my early years were Abe Turner, Aaron Rothman and Mitch Saltzberg. The first two played in US Championships, and Saltzberg later became New York State Champion. Abe had been in the merchant marine, and wrote some plays, unsuccessfully. He was burly, socially awkward in certain situations, but was basically warm and affectionate. For instance, he would sometimes greet me by putting an arm around my back, sniffle loudly, and then rub his nose on my shoulder. When he did that to others, most of them would quickly move away, but they didn't understand Abe.

Aaron Rothman had curly hair, thick glasses, a chunky build, and a great sense of humor. He was known for having *memorized* Reuben Fine's *Modern Chess Openings*!

I first saw Mitch Saltzberg on a warm afternoon with bared arms and drinking a can of beer out of a paper bag while playing a waiter named Boston Blackie. Mitch was a tailor, and would often leave work early to play pots at Fisher's, and his game was hard as nails. We played many games over the years. He was a little older than I, and I last saw him kibitzing a weekend Swiss, looking somewhat shrunken.

One famous player who came to 42nd Street in my early days there was Abe Kupchik, who had played in tournaments with Capablanca, and who had made a terrific score for the USA in a 1930's Olympiad. At Fisher's he liked to play fast for small stakes, choosing his opponents carefully. I played him a few times (he won), but then he dropped me.

There were two side rooms off the main playing area, and in one of these Fisher had placed a ping-pong table, which we younger customers used for a change of pace. One night two couples came in to play table tennis. The clearly dominant person in the group was a large man with a devilish looking goatee and mustache who spoke loudly, quickly, and had a wicked slam. He moved quite adroitly, considering that he was club-footed. Another prominent member of our cast had made his entrance: Arnold Proujansky. Arnold came from a family of diamond cutters in Belgium, and bitterly

cursed the doctor whom he felt was responsible for his infirmity. He played chess occasionally, but he became a fixture in a small rotating group of us who would hang out and discuss all subjects. Arnold was brilliant, cynical, opinionated, and practically held court in our coterie.

An intellectual who ceded no ground to Arnold was Joe Richman: wavy black hair, sharp squinty eyes, delicate nicotine-stained hands. Ever the keen observer, Joe made no attempt to dominate, but delivered telling rejoinders when appropriate. He taught in the public school system.

Often Teddy the jeweler would bring around a fascinating endgame study, and we would all grapple with that. A gentle New Yorker (if that is not a contradiction in terms), Teddy loved to discuss classical music, as did Ziggy Baumblatt, a thick-accented old European. At that time, one could go to Lewisohn stadium on a summer evening to see the New York Philharmonic for 25 cents; Ziggy gave me an advance critique of the music to be performed on my first visit there.

A young horse player named Shamai (Chummy) Feldman showed up at Fisher's, and we became good friends, and shared a small apartment on West 47th Street with two other guys. Chummy had squinty eyes, a biting sense of humor, and wore a strange-looking tall hat. He played chess, but what we shared most was financial adversity, and we would save up for occasional trips to the race track. I once won enough for three months' tuition for my painting classes. During a particularly hard winter Chummy and I were sick of our constant diet of fast food, and decided to splurge on a piece of 'real meat' at a local butcher. Though unfamiliar with our stove, we cooked the meat to increasingly tantalizing aromas, but then found we had no suitable knife to slice through the bone of the cheap cut. Frustrated, we finally had to divide whatever slivers we could scrape off. We were two incompetent young men.

I tried to supplement my meager budget with chess winnings, but I loved to play pots with the very best players whenever possible, which was a slightly losing proposition for me. So cultivating some other customers seemed in order, but I was not well suited to this. I once played, for 10 cents a game, an older man who carried a French translation of Carl Jung. His motivation was simply joy of the game and sociability. After a while he complained that I was... (struggling with his English) ... 'très mercantile'. 'Mercenary?', I guessed. ('Sorry Sir, but I needed the money.')

Several times I played an aspiring film maker who appeared to be as short of funds as I was. We were getting somewhat friendly, and at one point I debated the merits of a new Humphrey Bogart movie with him, relying on my

background of many films seen at the Museum of Modern Art. But we finally fell out, because I wanted to play for quarters, while he wanted to play for dimes. His name was Stanley Kubrick.

One winter evening I took Chummy to New Rochelle for a rare poker game with some of my high school buddies, whom I hadn't seen for some time. They received him well, neither of us won or lost much, and we had a good time. Later, around 3 a.m., Chummy and I walked several miles on deserted streets and crispy snow to get a train back to Manhattan. He said, 'The rich live well, don't they?', referring to my friend's comfortable home.

A huge change occurred at Fisher's. Harold took on a partner named John Fursa. John was a bridge player, and had run a club nearby. Now one of the side rooms was dedicated to bridge, and John brought his clientele with him, including world-class players like Ira Rubin and Vic Mitchell. This seemed like a very good move: Fursa often sat in on a game until a fourth player came in, and he was an asset to any table, with his skill, humor, and twinkling eyes. He definitely attracted new customers and some chess players started playing bridge, including myself. Larry Evans had always done most of his playing at the Marshall, but now he came to 42nd Street for the bridge. Aaron Rothman also took up the game. The ping-pong table was removed, but new games were added; scrabble and the oriental game of go, each of which developed its own clientele, with some cross fertilization as well.

One of the bridge players I befriended was Bob Mandel, a music student at Juilliard who was headed for a career as a conductor. He often took me to rehearsals of the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall. We could sit anywhere we pleased, and to see the greats of the music world fashioning their upcoming concerts was a wonderful experience. The orchestra's ambience was alternately relaxed and then quite serious as they addressed the intricate nuances of the compositions. Nearly all of the great conductors I saw led from memory, but Igor Stravinsky had to consult the score, even for his own music. Of course, he was quite old then. And frail Arturo Toscanini had to use a specially constructed railing on the podium.

I was most impressed by two Wagnerian singers, Svet Svanholm and Astrid Varnay. The sheer power of their voices practically blew me out of my seat, and yet their renditions were exquisitely controlled. At the end of their rehearsal the orchestra rose spontaneously and applauded them, a rare occurrence. I am forever grateful to Bob Mandel for enriching my musical world.

The place was busier than ever: some of the regulars included dapper Jack Schwartz; Richard Gilsten, who played a strangling defense in Scrabble; old musician Jack Bernstein, who knew Ravel in Paris; Argentinian José Serenyi; Puerto Rican Chico; the immaculately dressed kosher chicken killer; the eccentric who often complimented his opponent's 'spluvetuvious moves'; Kiven Plessett, winner of an intercollegiate championship; Lawrence Tierney, who played the title role in the film 'Dillinger'; Harold Schonberg, music critic of the *New York Times*; pianist Leonid Hambro; Rivkin the matchmaker, who would set up hustlers and customers; the limping 'Jersey'; non-smiling Starker, the painter; exuberant painter Norman Raeben, (the son of Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem), who had a studio in the Carnegie Hall building, and would take some of his students to Paris once a year; the head of the FBI's New York office, who played checkers; horse-player Saperstein, who made a big score on long-inactive 'Knockdown', which played $105 to win; and big-money players Adelman, Willie the waiter, charismatic Zeeman, animated Israeli Jack, Stewart the Chewer, Two-hair, who placed two long strands of hair over his bald head, and occasionally the Haitian Minister of the Interior.

In writing a memoir, particularly when describing events long past, one must address the question of mentioning individuals (many of them now dead) whose names would not be recognizable to the present-day reader. Well, these people were an important part of my environment at one time, and living their own vibrant, meaningful lives, and I feel an obligation to at least mention their names and an attribute or two. Everything passes, but the past was once fully as significant as our own era.

Coming by occasionally to check things out was a man from the nineteenth century, old Herman Helms, who had made the cover of *Chess Review* as the 'Dean of American Chess'. Herman wrote the *New York Times* chess column and still wore an old-fashioned collar and large bow tie. A true gentleman and very well respected, Herman played a strong speed game into his nineties, often coming in 4th or 5th in the weekly rapids, which had strong fields of 20 to 25 players. Another player whose career went way back was Edward Lasker, whom I played several times at the Marshall rapids. Helms, Lasker and Oscar Tenner, another ancient who played in the Manhattan rapids; all of them had such courtly manners – does this quality no longer exist in our age? Yes, there is Oscar Shapiro, but where are the young ones? (Alas, Oscar has died since this was written.)

Sam Richman hustling; Herman Helms standing, left

In 1948 I was still carrying on my unwise schedule of work at the Horn and Hardart Bakery, painting classes at the Art Student's League, and many hours of chess. One May afternoon I was playing Richard Gilsten, when blood suddenly welled up in my mouth. I told Gilsten I was hemorrhaging, and made my way across town to Bellevue hospital. I spent a month there while they examined the resurgence of my tuberculosis. Due to overcrowding, my bed and others were put in the halls for the first week. They discharged me with instructions to seek long-term care. I mentioned my problem to some of the guys at 42nd Street, and Boston Blackie strongly recommended a hospital in Denver, where he had visited a friend. I went to the New York office of the National Jewish Hospital, and learned that the only admission requirements were being sufficiently sick to justify hospitalization and an inability to pay for long-term care. I easily qualified. Chummy took me to the train, and I never saw or heard of him again.

The hospital was great. My roommate was Sam Goldman, a dear old man who had immigrated to the US in the early part of the century. A Yiddish newspaper was mailed to him daily, but he was illiterate in English, so he dictated his letters to me to send to his family back East. In gratitude, Sam's son thoughtfully arranged to have the *New York Times* delivered to me, and a couple of doctors started visiting my room to catch up on the news. After the mandatory months of strict bed rest, I did art work for the monthly patients' bulletin, arranged a chess match with players from the nearby university, broadcast the jazz program on the hospital radio system, and sometimes sneaked out for a tryst with a nurse. But I was one of the lucky ones without a grave medical problem; the occasional deaths of other patients were sobering reminders that I was not in a vacation resort. When handsome 21-year-old Englishman Peter Koch died in surgery, nurses came out of the operating room in tears. I attended the burial of 33-year old Palestinian seaman Alex Podwalny on a snow-swept hillside in a Denver suburb, and it was the most moving ceremony I've ever attended. Murray Willing, a forty-ish politically active New Yorker, hung on for several months before he died, but for those months he received very special attention from a devoted nurse. And vivacious Margalit Ten-Ami, a 20-year-old Yemenite girl, flirted immoderately with all the young men, taking full advantage of her exceptional beauty. But as the seriousness of her disease became evident, she grew progressively more subdued, and finally looked beseechingly out at us with her haunted eyes before she died.

The National Jewish Hospital at Denver accepted people of all faiths, but at that time about one-third of the patients were survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, where the harsh conditions took their toll, and they had contracted T.B. The infamous arm tattoos were there to be seen, and with a little gentle encouragement, some terrible experiences were revealed. Contrasting my relatively fortunate status with these horrific stories and aforementioned deaths, I was reminded of the well-known dream sequence in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. In that segment Hans (the protagonist) comes upon a beautiful landscape with people frolicking happily. He enters a building on a nearby hill, and finds that unspeakable horrors are taking place there. Hans then comes to realize that the joyful people nearby are fully aware of the horrors, and accept them as being an immutably essential part of existence, which has fortunately left them unscathed. So, though moderately ill, I accepted the hand dealt to me, and was grateful it wasn't worse.

After nine months in Denver, I returned to New York, nearly penniless. The doctors forbade me to work, and suggested going on welfare. I went to apply, but rebelled at their interrogatory methods, and left. This put me in a real fix. Chess hustling at Fisher's for small change was not viable, and in very little time my limited funds were depleted. I was evicted from my ten-dollar-a-week room, an embarrassing, unpleasant experience. And so it was that I found myself sleeping nights in Central Park, a 51-block-long area of greenery in the middle of Manhattan. It soon became apparent that too many insects prevented restful nights on the lawns, so I slept on rocky promontories, cushioned by several newspapers. On one occasion a cop nudged me on the feet with his nightstick, and told me to move on. There were plenty of other rocks.

My other clothes were somehow unobtainable, and paying 60 cents for shower facilities at Grand Central Station was out of the question, so I soon became bearded and unwashed with dirty clothes and probably an unpleasant odor. It was in this condition that I came across two young couples under a 6th Avenue streetlight, and I recognized Walter Johnson of New Rochelle, where we had double-dated about four years previously. Without saying anything I loomed up out of the darkness and thrust my hand towards Walter, and his instant reaction was to recoil with a distasteful expression on his face, thinking me a filthy beggar. I called him by name and he recognized me, responding politely with wary minimal responses. A brief chat and we parted. It was an awkward few moments for both of us.

This incident led to some serious thought about what was happening to me. Just 24 years old, and at rock bottom. Rather than setting a progressive life course, it seemed I was being bounced willy-nilly from one occurrence to another, much as in a pinball machine.

The ball caromed again, as Harold Fisher kindly took pity on my plight, and let me sleep on a cot in a tiny back room of his club. In those days the club closed at 2 a.m. and reopened at 10 a.m., so I was locked in during those hours for a couple of weeks. It certainly seemed strange to be in the darkened empty club with the bright lights of 42nd Street outside! After a short while in this dead-end situation, I swallowed my pride and applied for welfare, going through the same humiliating procedure that I had fled from before. Waiting for hours between the double- and triple-checking interrogations, I had the opportunity to study the faces of scores of other welfare dependents. They were generally older, and many had visible infirmities, but the universal characteristic was their expression; a somber, dispirited despondency. Their depression was quite infectious, but nevertheless I felt distinctly out of place. I was healthy in appearance (since my disease was inside), and being just 24 years old I still had a buoyant spirit that these people had irretrievably lost. Years later, looking back on the agency's very thorough investigative process and the obviously miserable condition of the other applicants, I have little patience with those who find it politically convenient to depict the welfare rolls as being filled with cheats.

At any rate, my hospital medical records qualified me for assistance, and I was able to resume a more normal existence within the framework of an austere allowance. The amount allotted by the welfare department enabled me to move from Fisher's cot to a tiny furnished room, thus solving one immediate crisis, but there wasn't a bit of fat in the budget; I was still bare bones poor and would remain so for quite a while.

Experiencing poverty over a sustained period of time has a cumulative effect on the psyche. While on the one hand the unceasing repetition of downtrodden days enables one to become inured to the situation, on the other hand it gradually sharpens one's sense of social contrasts and injustices. If just passing by obviously affluent carefree people on the street engenders twinges of envy, a radicalization of political thought then comes easily.

One pitfall I generally avoided was mismanagement of what paltry funds I had. There were some hungry days, but I never had to resort to what I saw one woman do in a $1.19 steak house. It was a very busy place on 42nd Street so she was able to slip from table to table after people left to finish their food remnants before a busboy removed the plates.

A $1.19 steak was an infrequent luxury for me, cheap hot dogs in a garish stand-up eatery were more usual. I found a pleasant island of escape from this dreary scene. A few blocks from the flea house on rapidly decaying 8th Avenue there was a refined restaurant left over from the street's better days. The prices at 'Ye Olde Eat Shoppe' were beyond my means except for one advertised loss leader special, a chicken croquettes dinner for 75¢. I ate there night after night, a welcome refuge from my depressing alternatives. After many, many of these dinners I asked the waiter how many hundreds of croquettes did one have to eat in order to qualify for a free one, but there was no provision for that.

Harold Fisher had a sister and brother-in-law, Joe Nick, who lived in a large apartment on West 94th Street, and somehow it happened that three of us chess players sublet two rooms from them. I shared one room with Frank Henter, and Paul Brandts had the other. It was my second time around with Frank, as he had been one of the three I had shared living space with when Chummy was still around. His chess was a little weaker, but he was fun to pal around with in those days, when we were both young. Unfortunately youth isn't a lasting quality, and over the years we drifted apart, as our interests diverged and our perceptions of each other changed. Paul and I were already good friends, having played many chess pots and eaten many dinners together. Slightly older than I, he wore thick glasses, walked with a slight limp, and his behavior was unfailingly polite and correct. He held an office job during the week and tried to set aside some time on the weekends to write detective novels. Paul's chess was strong enough to be invited to the US Championship, and his approach to the game was quite distinctive. He was convinced that if one sacrificed a pawn in the opening, compensatory attacking possibilities would ensue. Of course there are many gambit lines predicated on exactly this premise, but Paul pursued the idea well beyond the

generally accepted lines, often offering pawns in positions where the main justification was only his optimism. This was seemingly a free-wheeling aggressive style, but because he was so unswervingly committed to this approach, I felt it impaired his ability to vary his play when the situation demanded it, and this lack of flexibility indicated an actual rigidity of thinking.

The way he wrote his detective stories paralleled his chess mind set. He told me that all crime stories followed certain accepted patterns, and he wrote according to these 'formulas' (his word). Nothing of his was published that I know of. Whenever we saw a film, he would speak only of the plot, while I emphasized the visual aspects. So although living with Brandts had its minor frustrations (I often wished he could break loose), he was basically a very decent man. Paul was to die in 1982, in his late fifties.

Here are three major characters that contributed to Fisher's unique atmosphere. One was a talented checkers player named Morris. He was moon-faced with wide vacant eyes, always wore a hat, and would pace around most of the time, saying 'Hello, my name is Morris Krantz, and I'm far from reality.' Then there was a professional wrestler with cauliflower ears named Kola Kwariani, but known in Fisher's as 'Kak-Kak'. He would arrive around 11 p.m. from nearby Madison Square Garden, freshly showered, but usually sporting small cuts and bruises from his matches. Of course this huge man had a daunting effect on people, but he was apparently gentle by nature. During the course of a game, however, in the spirit of the oral sallies common at Fisher's, his deep voice would suddenly boom out at his opponent in some unintelligible language, and everyone's head would turn around apprehensively. One of his regular opponents refused to be intimidated, though. This was a player known only as Tiger, a short man with an erect posture and a large mouth which spewed forth unpleasantries that had no mitigating humor whatsoever. He was obnoxious, yet consistently attracted such a large gallery of kibitzers that I felt he was fulfilling a chosen role to achieve a perverse sort of notoriety. It was particularly interesting to see the diminutive Tiger take on the hulking Kak-Kak and thoroughly dominate the encounter irrespective of wins and losses. After many hours their board was strewn with cigarette ashes, but they ignored this. With real-life characters such as these, we had no reason to read any Damon Runyon stories.

After nine months, my health broke down for the third time, and I arrived back at the Denver hospital in time for dinner on Christmas Eve. Things looked bad, but a new drug became available just in time for me to avoid a recommended surgery.

For a while I roomed with George Real, a born-again Christian from 'a wide place in the road' in Texas. Over the months we politely explored our conflicting philosophies, and when I pointed out the apparent discrepancy between the existence of dinosaur remains and his view of a mere 6,000 year world history, he sent for a book which refuted my position. It said that the bones had been planted by the Devil. George was a gentle earnest soul.

I responded well to the drug treatment and after some months gained ambulatory status, when I met some extraordinary people. One man brought 600 books with him to the hospital, saying he would go nowhere without his beloved library.

When a thirty-ish Chinese physicist told me that he had played go in his adolescence, the hospital carpenter cut a board for us, and I marked the appropriate lines and painted half of 360 pennies black, and we were 'set to go', so to speak. At first I won easily, but after several months he completely reversed the results. Was he simply remembering long-forgotten stratagems, or did his obviously fine mind develop a superior grasp of the game as we played? Hard to tell.

Another Chinese patient I befriended was Ch'iao Ssu-tu, an artist who had contracted T.B. on an arduous trip through rural China. The United Nations had assigned him to portray a famine and resulting migration, and he described traveling on mule-back for many weeks amidst thousands of starving peasants. An image that stuck in his mind was that of a man conveying his mother on a wheelbarrow, and at times it was so cold that his watercolors froze on the paper. Earlier he had lost all of his precious paintings in a Shanghai air raid. Having seen famine, Ssu-tu could not abide waste; he would insist that the server in the hospital dining room take back food from what he deemed too large a helping. A very active man, he initiated art classes at the hospital, specializing in 'lightning portraits' which he said could capture the spirit of the sitter, whereas a carefully constructed rendering would deadeningly fail. (I wonder: Is the intuitive approach of blitz chess better able to capture the essence of a position rather than dry, stifling analysis?) There was a small group of Chinese affiliated with the hospital at that time, either as medical staff, technicians, or patients. When one of them saw me reading a liberal newspaper, he assumed a political kinship and invited me to a decorous social gathering, at which I was one of only two occidentals present. Ssu-tu handed me a sketchbook and sat for a quick portrait. After I struggled with the unexpected task, Ssu-tu took a look, shook his head, and said 'Try again.' This time I concentrated on capturing the *essence* of the sitter rather than doing a traditional drawing of the physical features. He was pleased with my second effort.

Unfortunately, some of the patients didn't recognize the opportunity provided by Ssu-tu's teaching, and interest in his classes waned. But the director of the Denver Art Museum took full advantage of the artist's presence, and gave him a one man show before his return to China.

As in my previous stay, many of the patients were concentration camp survivors. Henry Lilienheim was an urbane, highly cultured man who would later publish a book about his experiences during and after World War II. (The manuscript had already been written in 1947, but it was not published until 1994. The book is called *The Aftermath*, and the cover has testimonials by Elie Wiesel and the Dalai Lama.) Henry's roommate was also European, short and stocky, spoke no English, but had a cherubic smile. Though they were from vastly different social backgrounds (as one could tell from their faces), they got to know each other very well, confined as they were in the same room for months. Henry said his roommate revealed that he had knifed a man to death, and not as a soldier in the line of duty. So much for nice smiles and twinkling eyes.

Another refugee I met in Denver was Leni Faibis, and when we ran into each other in New York two years later we became staunch friends and remain so fifty years later. She has a rare combination of good sense, warm feelings and high moral values.

The ambulatory patients could take their meals in the dining room, walk around the grounds and participate in various rehabilitation activities. A beautiful 30-year-old Hungarian patient attracted my attention; we met and exchanged pleasantries a few times, and I was delighted when she offered to give me some French lessons after lunch each day. So we got to know each other very well indeed, and then she told me her tragic story. Rose Ickovic had been happily married with a year-old child when the Nazis struck. Her entire family was killed – husband, child, parents, siblings, about 20 people in all. A not unusual story in those terrible times, but the circumstances of her arrival at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp were particularly heart-rending. She had been traveling with her sister and child for a long time in a crowded boxcar, when the train arrived at the camp. Thrust out onto the station platform with many other Jews in a chaotic scene, they were not immediately aware of the life-and-death selection process conducted by the Nazis at each train's arrival. Rose's sister happened to be carrying the child at the time, and since all women with children were immediately sent to the gas chambers, she was motioned to one side, Rose to the other. When the sister suddenly realized what was happening, she screamed out 'This is not my child!', but many people were screaming at this point, and they all perished.

Rose and myself, National Jewish Hospital, 1950

Meeting people like Rose, with experiences of this sort, had a profound effect on me. I had never doubted the horrors of the holocaust, but I had been guilty of a 'healthy skepticism' that led me to believe that certain wartime dramatic incidents were either embellished or even created for propaganda purposes. Before meeting Rose this opinionated attitude had already caused me deep embarrassment on two occasions. I once listened to a radio dramatization of a group of Jews hiding from approaching Nazis (the sound of marching feet), and they had to stifle a baby's cries, which resulted in the child's death. Of course my sympathies were entirely with the fugitives, but having the child die like that seemed quite unlikely. A short time later I met someone at the hospital who knew someone in such a group of fugitives, and knew that a child had indeed died under those exact circumstances!

The other example of my comeuppance was really weird. One of the weekly movies at the hospital dealt with the sea war in the Pacific, and it opened with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. One brief sequence showed a Zero airplane strafing two girls on a tennis court, and one of them was hit. I don't remember if the film was made when the war was still on, and thus subject to propaganda needs, but I felt certain that this incident was created by a script writer who wanted to establish the villainy of the Japanese at the outset. After all, why would a pilot strafe a tennis court when there would be many more significant targets available? A young nurse asked me later if I had enjoyed the show, and I gave her the above criticism, saying that the artificial incident had spoiled the film for me. She made a noncommittal comment and went on with her work. Shortly after, I gave the same critique to another nurse, and she told me that the first nurse (whom I knew to be from Hawaii) *had been strafed on a tennis court and that she had seen the bullet wound on her arm!* I was shocked, and mortified. These two incidents could scarcely have

been better designed to inform me that I'd been a horse's ass. It takes a great deal of chutzpah to think that one understands how this complex world works. At best, we can have fragmentary insights.

After an eleven-month stay (my confinements now added up to three years), I was discharged with a favorable prognosis. The doctors still forbade me to work, though, so it was back to New York, welfare, art and chess, with twenty-seven pills added to my daily diet.

Rose Ickovic came through New York for a few days en route to her fiancé in Canada. I showed her the Metropolitan Museum, and at the 5th Avenue library we looked at an extraordinary book of holocaust photos called 'Lest We Forget' in which she pointed out some of the captured guards she had known in Bergen-Belsen. And then a tearful farewell as her train pulled out for Montreal.

Fisher's hadn't changed much. Chummy and a couple of others were gone. New players included Bernie Hill; tennis-armed Reuben Klugman; Ken Stern, a philosophy student at City College; David Kerman; Shelby Lyman, who in years hence would host World Championship matches on PBS; Jimmy Sherwin, Columbia student, future Interzonal participant and prominent corporate CEO; Allen Kaufman, future director of the American Chess Foundation and Chess In Schools; Harvard-schooled bridge player Len Rogosin, who would become one of the most respected horse handicappers in the country; Mike Yatron, a writer; Saul Wanetick; Hugh Myers, advocate of off-beat openings, whom I would meet in unexpected places; Eugene Shapiro, teacher; Englishman Roger Peckover; Norman Hurtlen; and Harold Feldheim, who once showed up in a red-lined black cloak.

The club still stayed open till 2 a.m., unless there were some players who wanted to continue, and they would then be accommodated for a higher fee. Fursa told me that a few chess games once continued until 8 a.m. at a fee of 50¢ per hour, when two men came in and wanted to play at a 10¢ rate. From that point on the club was open 24 hours a day.

The all-night games were usually played for high stakes, and the best hustlers had to have the ability to stay at the board for many hours if they wanted to take full advantage of their opponents. The Germans called this endurance capability 'Sitzfleisch', and a demoralized loser would be 'steaming', indicating a loss of self control.

Rubber bridge was played at 1/10 of a cent or 1/4 of a cent per point; a version called 'Chicago' was limited to four deals per partnership. A wild variant of bridge called 'reject' became popular with some of the better players who liked to gamble.

One day the police raided the place! They were looking for illegal gambling, and so they didn't bother the chess players, since chess had been legally designated as a game of skill rather than chance. But several bridge players, including Victor Mitchell, were briefly held. It came to nothing, since the police saw no money changing hands.

Except for Sam Richman's loss of his delicatessen, the biggest gambling story concerned a man named Jack Belden, who was a China correspondent for the *New York Times*, and an apparent chess addict. Starved for chess after a long stint in the Far East, Jack came in to Fisher's frequently for a year or so, receiving knight odds from strong players for high stakes. A heavy smoker, perhaps around 40 years old then, Jack played slowly with a strained expression, becoming visibly upset at his almost inevitable blunders. One night three of the country's finest players played Jack at $50 a game, and took turns dozing while Belden gave a glorious but costly performance of 'Sitzfleisch'. One of the players told me years later, 'I won a lot of money from Jack.'

Great foreign players came to 42nd Street while in town and would sometimes lose to the local pros. Benny Fine once soundly defeated a titled grandmaster. Of course the great Miguel Najdorf, who came several times, did fine. Spanish GM Arturo Pomar came, as did Canadian GM Duncan Suttles (We called him 'Sunken Duttles'). Colombian GM and Interzonalist Miguel Cuellar hung around for a month, becoming quite friendly with several of us. He ran a club of his own in Bogotá.

It should not be forgotten that most of the customers came for a simple love of the game, to while away a few hours before going home to normal lives. For those of us on the fringes of society, however, the scene at Fisher's was far more dramatic, becoming enmeshed with the ongoing crises of our lives. I had a restless spirit then, often walking home from 42nd Street to 94th Street well after midnight, one night being accompanied by Wang, a strong go player from Red China who was studying at Columbia. Exploring city neighborhoods at night intrigued me, and I would often go blocks out of my way seeking unfamiliar streets. It was an impulsive search for some undefined goal. I once walked home from the suburb of Mount Vernon (16.5 miles!) after visiting an aunt there, motivated not only by the search but the need to avoid paying the ten cent subway fare!

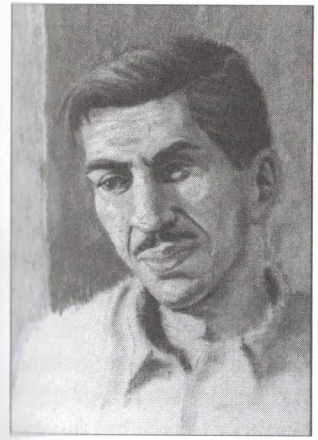
That same aunt once surprised me by donating $60 toward the cost of my art school expenses. It was surprising considering her own meager resources and because she had no knowledge of the art world. I once painted her portrait, which was done on infrequent Sunday visits over many months. Well

after it was finished I visited her again and found she had applied make-up to the portrait's face! On subsequent visits mascara and other embellishments had followed, with grotesque results. Considering this, her partial support of my art career was a bit odd, but she certainly meant well.

In 1951, after a 5-year interval, I re-enrolled at Pratt Institute, the commercial art school, thanks to the New York State Bureau of Rehabilitation, which paid my tuition for the second time. I failed again, but then returned to the fine-arts classes of the Art Students League, which suited me much better. In contrast to the frantic pace at Pratt, the League was entirely laid back. No required courses or assignments, but I worked much harder there on my own. Tuition was paid monthly and students chose whichever instructor whose style of work best matched their own interests. I was now ready to move beyond Brackman's limitations, and chose to study with Julian Levi and Morris Kantor. They encouraged me to introduce abstract elements into my work, and I made good progress.

One day a friend from the Denver hospital saw my name in the paper among the weekly rapid transit results, and tracked me down. Dave Palitz had endured thoracoplasty surgery, in which ribs are broken to permanently collapse a diseased lung, and so his breathing capacity was severely limited. We renewed our ties. I painted his portrait and did a dual portrait of his parents in Brooklyn. He couldn't work, of course, and was quite lonely, so he started coming to Fisher's even though he wasn't a games person. He would play gin rummy, and probably not very well. The double flight of stairs up to Fisher's was quite a challenge to Dave's lungs, so he stopped at the midway landing. There was a sign there giving the hourly rates, etc., so to remind himself to take the stairs slowly he wrote the word 'rest' on the sign. On each subsequent visit he would slowly decorate the letters, getting a breather as he did so, until there was an extremely large and ornate word on the sign, which other customers may have wondered about. Dave's trip from Brooklyn and up the stairs was an ordeal for him. I am relating this episode to illustrate how much Fisher's meant to many of us.

Dave was in touch with other New Yorkers who were ex-patients of the National Jewish Hospital, and through him I attended a one-time reunion of the consumptives. There I renewed contact with Leni Faibis, a former Auschwitz prisoner, and though we saw each other only occasionally, the relationship has continued for all these years. A dear friend. In 1952, through the hospital grapevine, Leni and I heard that Dave Palitz had died. With his persistent pain and shortness of breath, Dave had really had a rough time of it.



My oil painting of Dave Palitz

One night I arrived home from Fisher's at the usual hour of 4 a.m. Home was in a formerly stylish building on Riverside Drive, and my room was one of six living units that had once been part of a large apartment. Before going to sleep, I heard firemen responding to a blaze that had broken out in the floor above. After I woke the people in the other units a fireman knocked at the outer door and entered, axe in hand, to be sure the fire hadn't spread. When he came to my room and saw all of my paintings on the walls, he grinned and said 'I don't like your work!' An art critic, yet.

The fire had been extinguished, but not before a 96-year-old woman had died upstairs. There was a hole in the ceiling of our hallway, and water and smoke had poured down. Sleeping there was out of the question, so I called Leni. Arriving at her Queens apartment just as she was leaving for work, she said, 'You smell of smoke' and waved me to the couch as she went out the door.

There was another occasion of fire breaking out, this time right in an adjacent unit. The room was occupied by J. Gordon Harrell, a fifty-ish man who for some time had been involved in a major project. He had hired an airplane and photographer to fly at a low level over Manhattan and take photos of the entire island, with the aim of creating a photo map of the city. The individual photos were finally pieced together into a huge montage which now needed to be photographed. I knew that Len Rogosin, the bridge player-handicapper from Fisher's, had once dabbled in professional photography, so he brought his impressive-looking equipment into Harrell's room to do the job. He had bright lights, and hung sheets in front of them to diffuse the glare. The heat of the lamps caused a sheet to burst into flame, and there was a moment of near panic, with Harrell fearing that his work would be destroyed, but we were able to stamp out the fire.

I met a red-headed girl named Anne at the Metropolitan Museum, and we spent a lot of time together during the next three years. We would sometimes meet at Fisher's, but she wasn't fond of the place. I remember only a handful of women who frequented Fisher's, ex-US Women's Champions Lisa Lane and Mary Bain among them. Mary was a quiet, warm person who would occasionally invite groups of young players to her modest apartment for chess, bridge and light refreshments, staying in the background all the while. In the late 50's she would open a games club on 42nd Street just one block from Fisher's, but she didn't do well with it. Then there was the handsome young woman who first appeared in Fisher's many years ago, whose name I never learned. For more than 35 years our paths have crossed in chess locales, but she has remained nothing more than an enigmatic background presence. And while speaking of women in chess, I fondly remember the diminutive tournament player whose chair height enabled her to comfortably rest her breasts upon the table. This distracted her male opponents, but elicited admiration from passers-by.

At one point Fisher and Fursa made a fine move by hiring a middle-aged Austrian woman named Marie to serve coffee and light refreshments. She became like family to many of us, a big improvement over burly, taciturn Fred.

Each summer I would return to the wonderful open-air concerts at Lewisohn Stadium whenever the round trip subway fare and 25 cents admission were affordable for me. The star performers were available because of the sponsorship of a delightful society matron named Minnie Guggenheim. At times the conductor would have to interrupt the music when low-flying planes came by, and Minnie waged a constant battle with the airlines and city hall to get them to change their landing patterns.

One night there I ran into a high school acquaintance named Eric Schmertz. Eric was beginning a career in municipal government which would result in his becoming a highly ranked New York City official. At that time he was still an investigator for the Welfare Department, and after he told me that, he was stunned to learn that I was in effect one of his clients. From being fellow students in the posh suburb of New Rochelle, I could certainly understand his reaction to my social status, or lack thereof.

When the weather was pleasant some of us would go to the chess tables in Washington Square Park, in a delightful Bohemian area with a constant stream of odd characters and pretty girls passing by. A man named Jose Calderon offered a $100 prize for a tournament there: I tied for 1st with

Charlie Eastman, and we split the money. In his next *New York Times* column, Herman Helms criticized our lack of sportsmanship for not risking all in a playoff. For Mr. Helms, the game was to be played without compromise. After Helms died, I. A. Horowitz, the owner of *Chess Review* magazine, became the *New York Times* chess editor, and he would often make the rounds of the Manhattan, Fisher's and Marshall clubs on his way home.

After an unusual absence, George Treysman showed up one day wearing a silk kerchief around his sunken throat, and speaking with great effort in a hoarse whisper. He had had an operation for throat cancer, and an era was coming to an end. He could still play beautifully, but he must have been terribly frustrated at being unable to effectively deliver the pungent witticisms which usually accompanied his moves. He came around for a few months more, progressively subdued, and then the word came that he had been hospitalized. I deeply regret not having gone to see him, for whatever trivial excuse.

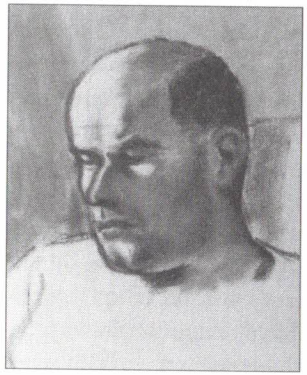
Some time later, Benny Fine came by with a similarly damaged throat, although he could still speak normally. And then Benny was gone. The dangers of tobacco were not well known in those days.

One day, after I'd won a few quarters from a newcomer, he said, 'Chess fascinates me because I've been able to master everything else I've turned to within three months, but this game resists my efforts.' Taking my first real look at him, I saw that he was around my age (26 at the time), bald, with a strong jaw and eyes that looked straight back at you. I didn't know what other fields he had mastered, but it wasn't finance, for he was wearing a cheap jacket that was too thin for the wintry weather. As we chatted, an extraordinary intelligence became apparent as he used highly cultured terms in no definable accent. He had a dazzling vocabulary, but when an American colloquialism was used he would often stop and savor it, as if he had never before heard it. The chess term 'busted', indicating a smashed position, particularly delighted him, and he would repeat it and laugh gleefully. His name was Dick Robb, and we became friends. It turned out that he was living even more precariously than I was, and for a time we shared our poverty. Obviously Dick was suited for intellectual work, but never made an effort to find an appropriate position. Instead, when his dwindling resources made him desperate enough, he would wash dishes or fill in as a waiter, work that he despised. He would usually stay in a $1.50-a-night hotel, and occasionally sleep on the floor of my furnished room. After a while he told me that Dick Robb was an alias, and he hinted strongly at a European aristocratic background, eventually revealing his 'real' name. He probably never went through normal employment procedures because the paperwork would en-

danger his preferred anonymity, for whatever reason. Dick could be greatly entertaining, and intriguing philosophical points peppered his conversation, but his high nervous energy left one feeling frazzled after a while. He would sometimes appear at my door around 3 a.m., needing a place to sleep, and one night he phoned me around that hour from the Mills hotel, a notorious 50¢-a-night flophouse. He had rented a cubicle, and while he slept someone had stolen his only pair of pants. So I went to rescue him with a shiny-bottomed spare pair of mine, and found him in the dingy lobby, wrapped in a bed sheet.

Dick invented a book-binding device and went to Chicago where the Cuneo Press paid for a prototype to be made, but nothing further came of it. A bit later he conceived of a scheme that was both ingenious and laughable. Dick struck up an acquaintance with the owners of a radio repair shop in Queens and made a deal; then we had some cheap advertisements printed, and pretty soon various confused-looking people came up to Fisher's, broken radios in hand, looking for the 'Times Square Radio Repair Company'. We assured them that they were in the right place, gave them a receipt, and took their radios out to Queens via a cheap subway ride. Of course it was a burdensome business, having to hang around the club all the time waiting for customers. Harold Fisher was very indulgent with us while it lasted.

Dick would occasionally lock horns with Proujansky and Joe Richman in our little debating coterie and when Joe discovered that Dick didn't know the French word 'escargots' (snails), he thought Dick's European background highly suspect.



My oil sketch of Dick Robb

Robb was a devoted Catholic and intensely interested in international politics from that perspective. When Joseph Stalin died, Dick became highly agi-

tated, and in a phone call to the *New York Times* he berated an editor for their inadequate obituary of the most infamous antichrist in history.

I took Dick to the Museum of Modern Art one day, a place for which he had no affinity. We came across a group in front of Picasso's huge 'Guernica' mural being lectured by a docent who soon would become a well-known art critic. After some laudatory exposition, Meyer (the docent) asked the group for any reactions. Dick said that the broad acceptance of abstract works like 'Guernica' reminded him of the story of the emperor's clothes in that there is really nothing of substance there. The docent bristled, saying he had heard this tired old canard before, that this point of view had long been discredited, and he asked Dick, 'Just what is your statement based on?' A moment of tenseness, but Dick replied, 'It is more well-founded than your manners, sir!' and stalked off amid audible gasps from the group.

Robb may not have had an understanding of modern art, but in other areas he had a chillingly vivid grasp of reality. One evening he struck up a conversation with a vagrant. The man was about 35, thin, wore tattered clothing and had an essentially gentle, simple nature. He was quite shy, but under Dick's sympathetic questioning he was responsive, and decided to trust us. Harry said he usually slept on a fire escape behind a theater, and got food from restaurant garbage cans. We saw some ugly-looking sores on his matted scalp, so we went to my nearby room, where we got him to remove his shirt. The sores were splotched all over his upper torso, and his unwashed body emitted a strong stench. Dick said we should take him to a hospital. As we walked there, Dick continued to probe for the underlying social or moral lesson in Harry's life. We learned that he had a married brother living in a comfortable house in Queens! Harry had indeed been living with his relatives, but he was prone to occasional epileptic fits, which his sister-in-law found socially embarrassing. So she had insisted that Harry be banished from their home, and her husband meekly acquiesced. At the emergency room the doctors cited various ailments, and recommended a three-day stay at the hospital, but Harry wouldn't sign himself in, so we had to watch him go off into the night. Dick then excoriated Harry's relatives for their moral dereliction in gripping phraseology that swung into a stinging indictment of society. Here, he was in his element.

One wonders what life with Robb would have been like without our urgent money problems, which sometimes created moments of high tension. He was a smoker, and once bought a pack of cigarettes when that cost a substantial percentage of our total assets. I was enraged, and while we began to argue the point, he took a couple of puffs and abruptly threw the new pack away, which somehow made his irresponsible purchase seem even worse to me. Friends would occasionally ask me why I hung around with Robb, indi-

cating their disapproval; and I had no ready answer, but in retrospect it was certainly a fascinating time. One day he sat down and composed a half dozen verses of poetry, revealing still another facet of his intelligence. In almost no time at all, he came up with these stunning lines:

Ah Beauty
Nature's chiefest fallacy.
A tincture of infinity
A touch the mortal frame
To goad the feeble flourish
Of nobled panting failure
Who is Man.

Eerie icy Night unfeeling,
Eternity unthinking,
Eternity unthought,
Jeers our forfeit valiance
Questing comeliness for light.
This Beauty –
Unreason's dearest jest.

Dick would sometimes disappear for months, offering no explanation of where he had been, and in 1955 he dropped out of sight again, for several years this time.

Joe Richman, one of Fisher's brightest resident intellects, taught in the public school system, and I had mentally type-cast him in those two spheres of activity. So it was a surprise when he offered an invitation to attend the off-Broadway premiere of a one-act play he'd written. At the tiny theater, I was surprised once again at the bold, avant-garde thrust of the drama. How many complexities lie behind the facades of those we presume to know! Joe also used to frequent the Cedar Street Bar in the Village where the painters who founded the Abstract Expressionist movement hung out. He enjoyed their discussions, and once invited me to go there with him. In what in retrospect seems like a major career blunder, I chose not to go, and it took years for my work to develop into a mature abstractionist form.

As it was, I wasn't doing too badly in a plodding sort of way. I had won a couple of minor awards at the Art Students League, and in 1954 I added a painting class at the National Academy of Design. At that school I had my sights set on a substantial cash prize which was awarded annually to the

most outstanding student. My first year there it was won by Jim Snodgrass, who also appeared on a TV quiz show called 'Twenty One' and became famous for providing proof to a congressional committee that the shows were rigged. Jim was quite a good painter, and deserved the school's award, so I waited until the next year.

Once each year the strongest clubs in the New York area played a series of round-robin matches on eight boards. This was called the Metropolitan Chess League, and the participating teams were the Manhattan, Marshall, Fisher's, Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, London Terrace and Log Cabin clubs. The Manhattan and Marshall clubs usually took turns winning; Fisher's often came in 3rd. Playing at the Log Cabin and London Terrace was interesting. The Log Cabin in New Jersey was in the home of an eccentric millionaire named E. Forry Laucks; playing first board for them was Franklin Howard. The London Terrace matches were held in a penthouse of the stylish London Terrace apartments. The famed artist Marcel Duchamp played there. I was paired with him and we drew a queen vs. three pieces game. He had a very genteel demeanor. I asked him what type of art work he was currently doing, and he smiled graciously and said 'I'm on a long vacation.' An earlier encounter with Duchamp at the New York State Championship in 1951 had produced this result:

Bill Hook – Marcel Duchamp

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♗f5 4.d4 e6 5.c4 ♗b4+ 6.♘c3 0-0 7.♕b3 ♘c6 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♗d2 ♘a5 10.♕a4 c6 11.e4 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 b5 13.♕c2 ♗g6 14.♘e5 ♘e7 15.0-0 f6 16.♘d3 ♘c4 17.♘c5 ♕d6 18.a4 a6 19.♖a2 e5 20.axb5 axb5 21.♖fa1 ♖xa2 22.♖xa2 ♘d5 23.♗h3 ♘db6 24.♗e6+ ♗f7 25.♗xf7+ ♖xf7 26.♗e3 ♘xe3 27.fxe3 g6 28.♖a6 ♘c4 29.♕a2 ♔g7 30.♖a8 f5 31.♖e8 fxe4 32.♘e6+ ♔h6 33.♕g2 g5 34.♕h3+ ♔g6 35.g4 ♖a7 36.♕h5+ ♔f6 37.♕xg5+ ♔f7 38.♕h5+ ♔f6 39.♕f5 mate.

I was the captain of the Fisher's team for a while, and we always looked forward to our match with the Manhattan, in that they represented in our minds a somewhat haughty establishment, and we were the gallant proletarians, out looking for a big upset.

One year we were to host the match, and it was a daunting prospect, since the Manhattan would have Pal Benko on 1st board, and he was then winning most of the weekend Swiss tournaments. But we hit upon the idea of putting Sam Richman on our first board. It was clearly our intent to offer Sam as a sacrifice to Benko, and that would make us relatively stronger on all the lower boards. Richman had never been a tournament player to our knowl-

edge, but there was a semblance of logic to the pairing in that after the death of Treysman, Sam was sort of king of the coffee house players. He was very pleased by our asking him, probably unaware of his sacrificial role. Of course he couldn't handle either the clock or Benko's play, and lost very quickly, apologizing as he went back to his customers. But the tactic worked! We won the match 5 to 3 and I.A. Horowitz devoted his *New York Times* column to '42nd Street chess'. We were euphoric.

Our league lineups varied, but Harry Baker usually played 1st board, and others were Bernie Hill, Ziggy Baumblatt (the old man was tough!), José Serenyi, Saul Wanetick, Murray Burn, Jack Pinneo, affable Willie Jones, Dave Kerman, Stan Tomchin, etc. In one league match I was paired against Florencio Campomanes, who later became president of FIDE, the International Chess Federation.

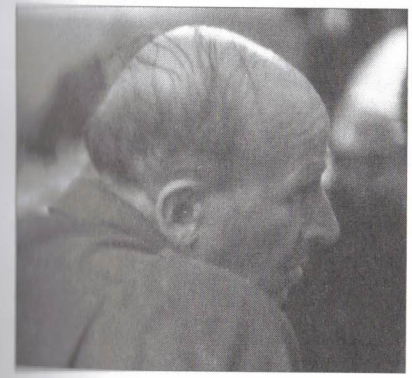
My bridge game had improved, and so on Sundays I managed the Cummings Bridge Studio on 57th Street, and also played at Al Roth's club nearby.

Anne went off to a Mexican art colony for a year, leaving a cat to be fed in her vacant Lower East Side apartment. On my way there one day, I dropped by the Washington Square chess tables and ran into Leo Jones, whom I'd been friendly with recently. Leo was a charismatic young black man with a bit of a wild streak; he once showed up at the park chess tables in his pajamas. With Leo was an intriguing-looking girl named Mimi – blonde, blue-eyed and 21. We all set off to feed Anne's cat, but Leo opted out after a couple of blocks, and I was alone with my future wife. What a momentous stroke of luck! We fed the cat, ate sandwiches in Katz's delicatessen. When Mimi rented a cheap apartment in Greenwich Village, I kept my welfare-paid furnished room, but spent a lot of time at her place. The apartment was what was known as a railroad flat, with its four rooms laid out in a straight line. The living room looked out onto the street, one floor below, then came a tiny bedroom, an even tinier storeroom, and finally the kitchen. The kitchen table top was removable, with a bathtub underneath and a shower overhead. We waged an unceasing war with roaches. The toilet was out in the hallway. To avoid sharing it with whomever might wander into the building, we had to keep it padlocked. We were together – it was a delightful time.

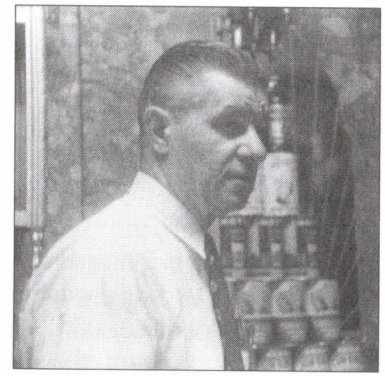
With her low-paid job at Equitable Life Assurance Society, and my welfare pittance, we had to scrimp to get by. One way we economized was to shun any restaurant that was so upscale as to have tablecloths. At dinner she could tell if I hoped to stay the night by noting whether there were extra pills in my pill box.

Stanley Kubrick once told Larry Evans (in an approximate paraphrase), 'If all of the misplaced mental energy of Fisher's could be harnessed, one could conquer the world.' Well, Stanley set out to conquer his share of the world via a spectacular directing career, and he used Fisher's club in one of his early films! In 'The Killing', starring Sterling Hayden, an ingenious race track robbery is planned in a chess club called Fisher's, and a professional wrestler (played by Kak-Kak) is recruited to create a diversionary one-man riot at the track. Kak-Kak said after the filming was completed, 'Kubrick (who was then in his 20's) is a great director.'

Trouble was brewing at Fisher's. For some time a palpable tension had been developing between the two owners, Fisher and Fursa. I don't know what the points of contention were, but it became bad enough for their customer to be aware of the problem. John Fursa took the more confrontational approach; he would raise his voice and stare fixedly at Harold. Harold would generally gaze back with a strained, hostile expression on his face. Something would have to happen soon.



Harold Fisher



John Fursa

As my second year of classes at the National Academy of Design drew to a close, I thought I had the painting prize locked up. But I was stunned to learn the jury deemed no one worthy of the full award, and split it up among the three competing classes. The winner in my class was a young Billy Dee Williams, who was a pretty fair painter before he became a big time film star. I was bitterly disappointed, but would give it one more try.

Mimi had very quickly developed into a terrific cook. We couldn't afford restaurants very often anyway, so we made a big thing out of having dinner in

our narrow railroad flat. We were in the courtship phase of our relationship when every meal is festive, but these events were remarkably enriched by what Mimi put on the table.

A friend named Richard Frey drove a cab at that time and to seek relief from his unhappy work would stop in at our apartment. He caught us at dinner a couple of times, which we of course shared with him. On about the third such occasion, he asked incredulously, 'Do you always eat like this?' He fell a bit out of our favor when he made a habit of falling asleep on our couch immediately after the meal. Abe Turner also came to dinner, and for a long time afterward would rave about Mimi's pineapple chicken.

One amusing sidelight from Washington Square. Mimi and I had gotten an extra sock from our Laundromat, so I used it to carry my small chess pieces to the park. One day I started to play with Amos Kaminsky, and he identified it as his missing sock! (He let me keep it.)

Word was getting around about Bobby Fischer. From the first rumors of a talented kid from Brooklyn, he was now appearing regularly at the speed tournaments, and getting progressively better scores. At one point, however, I had beaten him four times in a row, and he cried at least once, revealing the depth of his intensity for the game. But one night at the Marshall Chess Club rapids we played a French Defense and a very peculiar thing happened. In the middle of the game Bobby made a strong move and I suddenly had an almost physical sense of the power emanating from it. And Bobby moved again with the same effect; it was as if he were playing with dynamic rays of force that I had a heightened sensitivity to. It happened once more, and my position was busted, as the coffee house players would say. I never won another game from Bobby, and I wonder if any other players have had this experience while opposing him.

Big Changes

The doctors had finally stopped my daily dosage of 27 pills, deeming the tuberculosis arrested. Meanwhile, I had won a number of small painting awards, and on my third try, at the age of thirty-two, the jury gave me the coveted Hallgarten prize at the National Academy. Our life turned completely around. I immediately dropped my welfare subsistence and proposed to Mimi. We married and bought cheap tickets to Europe on the French Line.

Our wedding photo

When my friend Jim Snodgrass had won the same prize two years before he had gone to live a year in Ibiza, a small island in the Balearic group. His description of the place sounded ideal, particularly since the dollar was so strong against the Spanish peseta, so that was our goal, as well as visiting some of Europe's great art museums.

The trip across the Atlantic was the beginning of a great adventure for us, and on the ship was a face from Fisher's! He turned out to be a young journalist named Bob Frankel, along with wife Nancy, and we left open the possibility of meeting later at his post in Munich. In London we looked up Ken Stern, who was now studying at Oxford and sharing quarters with Anne, an attractive English medical student. They took us to the most active chess club, and I played my first blitz tournament on foreign soil, defeating Fazekas, the English Champion at that time. We spent a few delightful weeks in London and then Paris, where after having the traditional lunch of great bread, cheese and wine on the banks of the Seine we had to stagger off to our hotel

to sleep it off. I lost a few francs playing blitz with a Russian, and somehow we met Grandmaster Nicholas Rossolimo, who took us to an Algerian restaurant.

A train over the Pyrenees took us from snowy cold to the warm sun of Barcelona, where we first discovered wonderful Spanish food, and I kibitzed GM Arturo Pomar. (The reader will please excuse my frequent use of superlatives, but this trip was a bountiful cornucopia of new scenic, culinary and cultural experiences, and such a vast contrast from my down and out years in New York.) An overnight steamer took us to Ibiza, a somewhat arid twenty-five mile long island where we rented a furnished four-room house on the sea for $15.00 a month! (1958 prices, but still a great bargain). We bought bikes, discovered the wonders of snorkeling, and a casual basketball workout with other expatriates led to a game offer from the locals. This informal challenge resulted in 200 spectators, using my chess clock as a timer, and little kids shaking the basket whenever we shot. Our center was Clifford Irving, who was later sent to prison for his false biography of Howard Hughes, and has written over 20 books since then. I gave chess simultaneous exhibitions at a café and military and social clubs, and somehow managed to do some painting.

We started feeding a stray cat which soon became noticeably pregnant. Late one night Reddy started yowling and scratching on our bedroom door. We finally let her in and she lay down between my legs. Still later some unusual sounds awakened me, and my flashlight beam showed Reddy licking two tiny kittens. *We* had given birth!

In the spring, we took a three-month trip through Southern Europe, visiting museums and chess clubs. While waiting in Trieste three days for a Yugoslav visa we found an active chess scene in a café, and talked with what we agreed was the European counterpart to Fisher's Joe Richman. A man took a day off from work to show us around Trieste! Whenever we found a chess club we experienced warm welcomes, despite language differences. At a club in Zagreb Larry Evans' photo was on the wall, from a previous visit. After I'd been doing well in some blitz games, someone asked whether I would like them to arrange a match with a grandmaster. But before I could eagerly agree, Mimi said, 'Oh no, thanks.' (Groan.) In minaret-dotted Sarajevo, no one we met understood English, but we somehow found a chess club. I was happily blitzing away when someone using sign language indicated that there was a phone call for Mimi! The man had called his wife who spoke a little French, in order to find out why we were there. (At that time tourism was almost non-existent in Yugoslavia.) In Munich we met up again with the journalist from the boat trip, and after dinner still another face from Fisher's

came over! At the Munich chess club I took a photo of Harold Hohenberger, who later emigrated and became active on the US chess scene for many years.

Back on Ibiza in the summer, Ken Stern and his girl came down from London, and as we waited on the jetty when their ship pulled in, Ken shouted out from the rail 'Pawn to King Four!' Bike rides to deserted beaches and lots of blitz. They stayed with us for several weeks. Mimi returned to New York a month early to find an apartment and a job. I traveled back via chess clubs and museums in Madrid and Amsterdam, and arrived in New York with fifty-seven cents in my pocket.

There was a momentous change in the chess scene on 42nd Street. Harold Fisher's partnership with John Fursa came to an end, with John retaining ownership of the club. Harold immediately opened another place a block away, but was able to lure only a small number of players from their habitual hangout. Then Larry Evans, in partnership with Aaron Rothman, bought out Mary Bain's club, which had never caught on. So at this time there were three clubs operating within two city blocks on 42nd Street!

I sold six or eight of my chess paintings to Larry to decorate his walls, and along with sumptuous red-cushioned chairs, the place was considerably more attractive than Fursa's. But despite these embellishments and Larry's renown as a former US Champion, the customers remained where the action was, until... a fire broke out in Fursa's! As the firemen came to evacuate the place, Willie the waiter was so absorbed in his game that he vexedly tried to wave them away. Arriving while many of the players were still milling around confusedly on the street below, I suggested that we all go over to Larry's club which was unknown to many of them. As we all trooped in, one of them said, 'Why, this is a *nice* place!' And so while Fursa's club closed for repairs, Larry's business got a fortuitous jump start, and it remained viable for quite a while.

Off and on over the years Larry Evans and I were fairly friendly, getting together occasionally. Aside from the chess paintings for his club, he had bought a couple of my student paintings, one of which was a nude of an ex-Ziegfeld Follies girl, who had turned to modeling in her elderly corpulent years. Also, Larry once commissioned me to paint a nude of his current girlfriend. It took me three days. When we played blitz while he was US Champion, I would call myself the 'temporary US Champion' whenever I won. Later it was the 'temporary *ex*-US Champion.' When we lived just a few blocks apart, he once called me over for some blitz when he was suffering from dental surgery. I took advantage of his pain by winning the first two games, but then he won 17 times in a row.

At a time when he shared an apartment with writer Mike Yatron, I played a marathon blitz with Mike on a hot summer night. Being without air conditioning, we opened the windows and played quietly out of consideration for the neighbors. But the next day there came a complaint of 'thumping noises all night long'!

Mimi started developing a career in economics at the Federal Reserve Bank, while I painted in our small apartment. After work we would often meet at one of the clubs, where there were occasional changes in the cast of characters. Max Pavey, the gentleman Scot, died that year at an untimely age.

Dick Robb suddenly showed up at our apartment door while I was in a tournament in Washington DC. Mimi had never met Dick, but knew all about him, and therefore felt obligated to entertain him until I could be reached by phone. Dick was in his usual intense mode and after several hours Mimi felt disquieted and exhausted. My response to Dick on the phone was guarded, and when I impulsively indicated that we would not be giving him any financial help, he took offense, and that was our last contact with him.

We had purchased a good 35 mm camera during our Europe trip, and after our return I occasionally took photos at Fisher's and at Larry Evans' club. My subjects were invariably the older chess players whose life experiences were indelibly etched on their expressive faces. Much more interesting than the immature insipid visages of the young, or so I thought at the time. Being well known at the club, my camera work was well tolerated, and my art background facilitated compositional arrangements. It was enjoyable, and it was the beginning of an occupation that became very important to me.

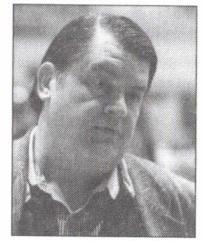
The first tournament I photographed was a noteworthy event in 1959 called the 'Log Cabin Invitational', which was held partly in Larry Evans' club, and partly in the home of millionaire E. Forry Laucks, who financed it. Laucks' home was the base of his 'Log Cabin Chess Club' in New Jersey, and he was known for flying selected members to Europe for informal matches. Destinations included Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the west coast and Alaska in the US.

The tournament was offered to the top 10 players in the country, and of course included five-time US Champion Sammy Reshevsky, but there was a catch. Laucks came up with a schedule that included games on Friday night and Saturday, which would preclude the participation of Reshevsky, an orthodox Jew. Sammy wanted to play and an effort was made to book the games around the Sabbath, but Laucks was adamant until a players' meeting was suggested to decide the issue. Laucks agreed, but insisted that Reshevsky

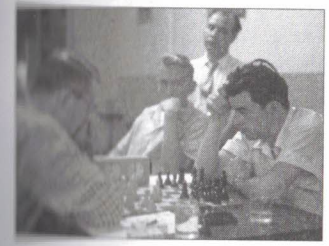
could not play unless there was a unanimous vote in his favor. Of course, one player vetoed Sammy on 'personal grounds' and one wonders whether Laucks knew that in advance. Also, the fact that among many photos hanging in Laucks' home were several that prominently displayed the Nazi flag makes one wonder even more. Former US Champion Arnold Denker was outraged and *Chess Review* editor I. A. Horowitz labeled the incident as a dark day in the history of US chess.

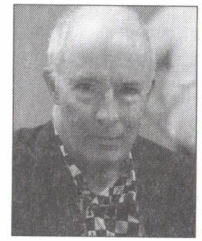
Here are my previously unpublished photos of the 1959 tournament. Additionally included are shots of Lombardy, Benko, and Robert Byrne which were taken many years later. Kalme and Mednis have since died. After the tournament Lombardy announced he was quitting his job to study for the priesthood.

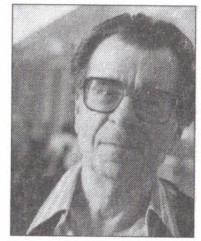
Bill Lombardy, Log Cabin Invitational



Bill Lombardy, 1994

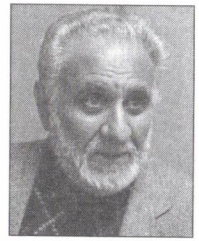






Robert Byrne vs. Pal Benko, Log Cabin Invitational (left)
Robert Byrne, US Open, 1994 (middle)
Pal Benko, Las Vegas, 1999 (right)

Larry Evans, Log Cabin Invitational



Larry Evans, Reno, 1996

The Final Standings – Log Cabin Invitational, 1959			
William Lombardy	7-2	Charles Kalme	4½-4½
Pal Benko	6½-2½	Walter Shipman	4-5
Larry Evans	6-3	James Cross	3-6
Arthur Bisguier	5-4	Edmar Mednis	2-7
Robert Byrne	5-4	James Sherwin	2-7

In 1960 I won two more painting grants! The second one, from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, was a nationally prestigious award, and we thought my career would now rocket to giddy heights. Ironically, though, this painting award would have a much more significant effect on my chess life. Read on.

When we had first tried snorkeling in Spain, I was much impressed by the visual qualities of the undersea world, in which more distant objects dissolved into an intriguing gloom. So it was natural that I would use these grants to take undersea photos and create paintings from selected composites. For this purpose we were fortunate to find a house to rent on a small 1½-mile-long cay (Cooper Island) in the British Virgin Islands. A fisherman's family were the only other residents, and we rented a small open boat to make weekly shopping trips seven miles away, usually getting drenched by the choppy seas. We had a gas fridge but no electricity, slept out on the porch to catch the breeze, but sometimes were driven inside by sudden torrential rains.

As whites in the BVI at that time, we became very comfortable with being part of the 1% minority, thanks to our warm reception by the blacks. We dove for conchs and lobster with the fishermen from nearby Salt Island, and helped them free their snagged nets when they were attempting to encircle a large school of fish.

We were helped by the fishermen in different ways. Our five horsepower Seagull was a good engine, but sometimes stopped out in mid-channel. A dirty spark plug was often the cause, and the fisherman taught us to clean it by scraping off some of the grease with a wire, and then pour a little gasoline into our bailing gourd, swish the plug around in it, and then light the gas with a match. It was a seemingly dangerous procedure, but quite effective. There were other more complicated motor problems, and we would raise up the engine to poke around ineffectually. On nearby Salt Island, a couple of miles away, our good friend Norwell Durante often watched us on our trips to town, and when his field glasses picked out a flash of metal he

knew we had raised the motor for some kind of problem. If our boat still wouldn't move after a few minutes, he would get into his boat and come rescue us, usually fixing our motor on the spot. This happened numerous times. Thanks again, Norwell!

On another occasion I was out there alone heading for Cooper Island in very rough waters. Instead of the usual route from town when our boat could meet the seas head on, I was coming from another direction with the waves hitting the boat broadside, a much trickier handling problem. A huge wave tipped me far over, and so certain was I that a capsize was imminent that I instantly grabbed my snorkel and facemask for a long swim to land. Fortunately the boat did not tip over, and later William Leonard of Cooper told me that he had been watching me from his boat some distance away.

I took hundreds of undersea photos, using combinations of them to create paintings, and long after my work became abstract the underwater influence was still quite evident. My Cooper Island output was small; Mimi and I mostly focused on our extraordinary living experience there. Cornelius Leonard, known as 'Down South', and his wife Maria headed the resident family on Cooper. South had fathered 21 children, 20 by Maria and one 'on the outside'. Thirteen survived, and three of them were continuing the fishing tradition, going out to sea at 3 a.m. to haul up scores of traps from the depths and then taking their catch to market. South was then in his sixties and retired from the sea but still doing hard work hacking bush, fencing and gardening. He would say of his youth, 'I wasn't big, but I was wire strong.' We came to love this old man, and he would come to our house most every evening for a drink, frequently dinner, and always some really good conversation. Having been sent to work at sea as a child, South was illiterate, but his knowledge of World War II was prodigious, citing famous battles, generals and admirals. He had listened to daily radio reports of the great conflict and remembered countless details. His radio expertise extended to other fields, of course, and we were particularly held in thrall by his island lore, such as that wonderful time during the prohibition era when 90 barrels of rum came floating in from a down-island shipwreck.

On Sundays we would usually go to Salt Island, where 26 people lived on a narrow strip of sand between the sea and the salt pond. There we would socialize, walk around, and then share a large meal cooked by Norwell's wife Ina. At times Mimi would go there with South, while I remained behind. Inevitably South's wife and daughter would come to visit, and after some awkward conversational efforts I would excuse myself and take up a book. Maria would afterwards say 'I loved to watch Bill read'! When we finally had to leave our friends after nine months, there were tears on both sides.

Back in New York, a scrabble-playing businessman named Leonard Hershkowitz made an offer to buy Larry Evans out but was refused. Leonard was an habitué of Fursa's, and he had a vision somewhat akin to what Kubrick said years before about harnessing the mental energy of the 42nd Street chess players. Leonard's plan was to open an upscale version of the club, hire some of the available minds and put them into appropriate areas of responsibility, which would focus their talents in more productive directions. Rather than be discouraged by Evans' refusal to sell, Hershkowitz upped the ante, developing a more grandiose version of his idea.

For many years, straddling the narrow intersection of 42nd Street, 7th Avenue and Broadway, there existed a stylish restaurant called the Crossroads, covering two floors. They closed, and Leonard decided this site would be ideal for his project. He opened negotiations with the owners and set up a planning headquarters in a hotel suite. He took me in to look at the beautifully arched dining alcoves and gave me an advance to take measurements and design games-oriented murals. I later went up to the suite and found it crowded with 42nd Street players who were participating in the project. A couple of them were in their underwear, unshaven with whiskies in hand, and Leonard's eyes appeared glazed. This scene made me uneasy, and when I heard that valet parking was part of the plan, and considering the astronomical rent required for the site, the scheme seemed 'far from reality', as Morris Krantz would say. Nevertheless, the project was still alive when Leonard catered an elaborate cocktail party in an office above the restaurant, with many illustrious members of the New York chess world in attendance. It was just after this celebratory event that everything collapsed, presumably because Hershkowitz's idealistic reach exceeded his resources. Good show, Leonard! Your heart was in the right place. He seemed awkwardly appreciative when I delivered the mural sketches he'd paid for, but no longer needed.

It was not too long after this when word came that Aaron Rothman, whom I remember best for his exuberant sense of humor, had committed suicide in his 30's. I never heard any details, and when I recently asked his former partner about it, Evans could shed no light on the tragedy.

The days of 10-second chess were now over. Dual clocks had become quite common, and strong young blitz players appeared on 42nd Street. There was Larry Gilden, a philosophy student with a fine sense of humor. He would later represent the US in a World Junior Championship and the World Student Teams Tournament, and play in the US Championship. Asa Hoffman developed a very formidable speed game, which he still practices. Bernie Zuckerman is famed for his knowledge of openings, and would play in US Championships.

Stuart Margulies later became a psychologist, and for a time he would come by, set up two similar positions and ask us which was more aesthetically pleasing. The results of this unusual research project were to be published in a psychology journal. He would also co-author the book *Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess*, which has sold well for many years.

Mike Senkiewicz was another young blitzer. We quickly became friends despite a 20-year age differential. He has a superb mind for games; in chess he would win the Armed Forces Championship and play for the US students' team in Israel; he would write the scrabble dictionary and become one of the two best players in the US; and he would be consistently rated among the world's top ten backgammon players. Mike's proficiency in the other games developed later. When he first came to 42nd Street at age 17 it was only chess that absorbed him. His talent was already apparent, and he challenged most of our best players.

Mike lived with his family only a few blocks away in the Hell's Kitchen area, and once when there was some trouble at home he spent three days at Fursa's, stretched out on several chairs when he needed sleep. Abe Kupchik told him, 'Young man, you shouldn't abuse yourself in this way.' Mike may have done this only once, but he was hardly alone in sleeping at the club; sometimes three or four could be seen lying down for some serious slumber. The management was very indulgent since they didn't want to alienate any customers. The purposeful sleepers were usually young, but many of the older clientele would delay going home for whatever reason and nod off, usually sitting erect while kibitzing, and some would surrender to their fatigue by slumping over a table. That many of us felt comfortable enough to sleep in a public place is a reflection of the nature of the club, and what it meant to us. For many it was a second home, a temporizing refuge from all sorts of problems. Also, there was an ongoing drama of sorts, players were always dropping in, and so we were reluctant to leave for fear of missing something. And of course, we were all caught up in fascination with the game itself, and thus stayed on until our numbed minds could scarcely function, and still we stayed, playing on automatic pilot.

The Tiger once fell asleep while kibitzing, head cocked back and snoring, and an impish fellow dropped a chess piece into the open mouth and quickly darted away. Since Tiger was renowned for his lack of humor, I can well imagine his sputtering cursing reaction.

A young Steve Grant appeared, playing good blitz and in the process of becoming a doctor, very pleasant to play with. Many years later he is in the important position of choosing grant recipients from the National Institute of Health.

Another newcomer was Frank Kuehnrich, who in future years would win the scrabble Championship of New York twice in a row. The scrabble clien-

tele at Fursa's had grown considerably. Originally there were just a few players, then some chess players tried it and used the dual-faced chess clocks; 15-minute games became the accepted norm. At first no one knew of any organized scrabble tournaments, so this little group of aficionados grew on its own, applying their fine game minds to create their own strategies. One day they were speculating about the quality of scrabble play outside of New York, and Leonard Hershkowitz doubted that anyone elsewhere could have equaled the techniques that were developed at Fursa's. One of the 42nd Street players, Ricky Long, a former Canadian amateur boxing champion, had actually memorized a Webster's dictionary to hone his scrabble skills! Sure enough, when organized tournaments became a reality, two of the early national champions came from 42nd Street. They were Mike Senkiewicz, as mentioned earlier, and Lester Schoenbrun.

In late 1962 some of us left Fursa's to eat nearby, and included in the group was Abe Turner, who had recently played in the US Championship. Feeling festive after good Chinese food, I made a light-hearted remark, and Abe's reply was a surprising downer. Still buoyant, I laughingly asked, 'What's the matter, Abe, aren't you enjoying life?' He replied 'No', and I realized he was quite serious. The gods must have heard him, because just ten days later, Abe was dead. He had been working for Al Horowitz's *Chess Review* magazine for just two weeks, when a deranged employee suddenly knifed him, without any provocation. Although he had some social ineptitude, Abe was nevertheless respected and well liked, as evidenced by the huge turnout for his funeral.

Abe Turner at Fisher's, 1958

Another well-known player who died that year was Attilio Dicamillo, who had played in a US Championship. He was from Philadelphia, and frequently

came to New York for the Manhattan Club's speed tournaments, where I played him several times. Dicamillo was a bookie, an unusual and illegal occupation. But if anyone ever looked the part of his role in life, he certainly did. Extremely thin and with a sallow unhealthy-looking complexion and coifed black hair, he wore very expensive suits with padded shoulders. Ever serious in demeanor, this striking-looking player died in his forties.

While we were living on Cooper in 1961, Mimi's father had come down for a week's visit. We had taken George out to the cay in our small boat in choppy seas, getting drenched as usual, and having to bail. He said, 'Back home they would call the coast guard if they knew a small boat was out in weather like this.' It was his first vacation in many years, and he was captivated by the island, as we were. Now in 1962 he offered to help us buy some property there, and we eagerly jumped at the chance. Mimi and her father went down to negotiate a purchase with South. Although we didn't get the land we originally wanted, striking a deal was relatively easy since South desired our return to Cooper as much as we did. So we ended up with 2¾ acres at the end of the major bay and a prospective cliff-top house site with water on three sides. Mimi and I couldn't have been more delighted; we had made many friends in the BVI and it was a community we wanted to be a part of. This was a major event in our lives.

In 1963 construction was started on the house I had designed for Cooper Island, and I spent three months camping under a tarp on the beach and eating cold food out of cans. We used a local contractor and hired some of our fishermen friends from nearby Salt Island. All of the materials, sand, gravel, cement, steel rods, etc., had to be carried up a steep hill, and since John Leonard's ass carried more than any man, it received an appropriately higher wage. Upon my return, Mimi said I had never looked better.

It was that same year that Walter Browne first came to Fursa's at the age of 14. Already a talented player, the future US Champion (6 times!) was intense, impulsive, combative, yet always fair. We would play many sessions of blitz over the years.

Several of the young players began calling our club the 'flea house', in recognition of the nearby flea circus and the club's general shabbiness. But I always felt that the richness of character far outweighed the lack of niceties.

The 1964 US Open was in Boston, and it became affordable when Shelby Lyman kindly invited me to stay in his family home nearby. While there I got to know two of his friends; young Steve Brandwein, a super blitz player who would move to New York a little later, and Emil Reubens, a gracious old man

whose forehead bore a saber-cut scar from a violent time in Russia. Known as E.M., he was active in promoting chess in prisons.

In the tournament my score was 8-2 when Robert Byrne outclassed me, and in the final round being a rook ahead of Zuckerman wasn't enough as I gave it back in time pressure and lost. Exactly what a low-grade master is expected to do!

Larry Evans ran his club for about three years, and then opted out and Harold Fisher took over, giving it one more try. My chess paintings were part of the deal and remained hanging there. Not long afterward Harold died, and his family (the Nicks) asked me to buy back the paintings, but I couldn't afford it then, and so the art disappeared.

Thus Fursa's was the only surviving club, but his partnership battles with Fisher, the fire and competition exacted their toll, and we saw less of his engaging lightheartedness and more evidence of an apparently heroic battle to keep things under control. On a personal level, he always treated me well, even lending me some money during hard times.

In 1965 the US Open was held in Puerto Rico, which was fine with me, since Cooper Island was just 75 miles away. The Puerto Ricans were great hosts, offering trips to the rain forest, beach, rum factory, etc. After the day's round a group of us would pit our chessic brains against the casino. My roommate Jack Mayer lent me a blackjack book and thus launched me upon another career of sorts. A player's wife gave birth while in San Juan, and E. Forry Laucks, the eccentric millionaire, had a fatal heart attack in a restaurant. Some tasteless wag wrote 'Dropped out' next to Laucks' name on the cross table.

A resident of the US Virgin Islands named Walter Hoyt approached me, saying that there was a new Caribbean chess league of about a dozen countries and the USVI would like me to play 1st board on their team! That certainly sounded like fun, and since Walter said that my house being in the British rather than the USVI wouldn't be a problem, I readily agreed.

In 1966, I felt ready to exhibit my paintings, and after enduring the ego-battering experience of offering my work to many disdainful gallery owners, I finally got a show booked at a well-located but unimportant gallery for the unfortunately chosen month of November. Unfortunately, because in September I received a call from Walter Hoyt, saying that the USVI had joined FIDE, and wanted me to play 1st board in that supremely attractive chess event, the Olympiad(!), to be held in Cuba in... November. What to do? My first one-man show ever, or the Olympiad, and I could only attend

one. Mimi left it entirely up to me, but she was happy when I opted for the show. I phoned my regrets to Walter, who then said their team was so weak that they wouldn't go without me, but he hoped we could make it to the next Olympiad. As for the exhibition, it had about as much impact on the art world as a stone dropping into the ocean. One interesting sidelight – we had sent out equal numbers of invitations to chess players and to Mimi's co-workers at the Federal Reserve Bank. Only a few personal friends came from the chess world, while a much larger group of the economists visited the show. This disparity was disappointing to me, and I hope this doesn't reflect a general lack of cultural interest among chess players.

In June 1967 our Virgin Islands team joined nine other countries in the Dominican Republic and played matches with flags, arbiters, ceremonies and parties, the whole caboodle. (See report, *Chess Review*, October 1967.) This sort of thing is routine for titled players, but as a low-rated master used to austere weekend Swiss tournaments, I was in heaven. This was good hard chess mixed with a truly festive spirit, and great people. These same conditions applied to each of the other five Caribbean countries we ultimately played in, and I shook hands with two Heads of State, as well.

On arriving at our hotel in Santo Domingo I was pleasantly surprised to be greeted by Hugh Myers, whom I knew from 42nd Street. He was there working for the Peace Corps, and we were to play each other in several foreign countries. Hugh soon married a Dominican girl and they had two children, but the kids and their grandmother were tragically lost in a plane crash. Hugh later became known for his espousal of offbeat openings in magazines he published.

Each night several of us would go to the casino, and since its management then knew nothing about card counting in blackjack, I accumulated a fairly sizable profit over ten days. The problem was the gains were in the Dominican peso, which was so weak at the time that there was no international market for it. So it was vital to arrange an unofficial exchange before leaving the country. Well in advance of my departure I told a Dominican friend about it, and he assured me that he would set up the transaction, and he kept assuring me daily, up till the day of my flight, by which time I was quite worried about it. Finally, at the airport, my friend casually waved over an airport employee, told me the amount agreed on, and hurried off to tend to other matters. The employee spoke only Spanish, while my grasp of it was only useful in ordering dinner. He abruptly motioned me to follow him, and set off rapidly for the men's room, where he disappeared into a stall as I entered. Since the two adjacent stalls were occupied, and I wasn't about to share a stall with him or anyone else, I had no recourse but to stand there awkwardly. Some-

one at a nearby urinal showed that he misread my reason for being there, and I now felt constrained to look up at the ceiling. What could I say in my restaurant Spanish if accosted? 'Estoy esperando para mi camerero'. No, that wouldn't do. Finally, a stall emptied, and I dashed in. Apparently the employee recognized my gringo shoes, for a fistful of money was thrust underneath the barrier and the exchange was accomplished.

The USVI had come in last in the tournament, and so we were given a small trophy depicting the hind quarters of a horse!

The following year the teams competed in El Salvador in a similarly festive atmosphere. The highlight of this tournament took place on the free day, whereby the players were taken to an inactive volcano for blitz, feasting and swimming in a beautiful lake which nestled within the mountainous cone. Probably the best non-playing day of my many tournaments.

Costa Rica was the site of the next Caribbean tournament, but unfortunately a few days before my plane left for Central America I sprained my ankle on a badminton court, and so arrived in San Jose on crutches. Nothing deters an avid chess player!

In Panama in 1970 our hosts took us to see the locks of the famous canal, which was interesting, but they also organized a beauty contest, and later the participants were the hostesses at a great party!

My final Caribbean team tournament took place in Guatemala. This country's proximity to Mexico results in an intriguing admixture of cultures. A highlight here was a trip to Antigua, which still looked like a colonial-era town.

In 1967 Steve Brandwein came to New York from Boston and promptly became a fixture at the flea house, contributing a distinctly political slant to our ongoing bull sessions. Rated in the US top 50 before he gave up tournament chess, Steve's blitz game was devastating, and following the tradition of coffee house cajolery he would address certain opponents as 'simian', knowing that they would probably not know the meaning of the word. Though he was generally mild-mannered and soft-spoken, sharp viewpoints could be found in his speech.

Since the excavation for our Cooper Island house was first begun in 1963, construction had continued until our available funds ran out, and we then had one finished wing and connecting porch. The other wing would be finished in about 10 years when it became affordable.

In the meantime it was a viable dwelling of sorts and we would come down for three or four weeks each year on Mimi's vacation. There was no

hot water or electricity and we used gas refrigerators, which had to be replaced every few years. Rainwater fell from our roof through pipes to a large cistern under our porch. In a sense it was like camping out in a large concrete structure, but we loved it, and were able to maintain contact with our fishermen friends.

For several years after the 1965 US Open in San Juan, the Puerto Ricans organized an annual 'Puerto Rico Open' tournament. After one of these events Julio Kaplan, who would soon become the World Junior Champion, came with me to Cooper Island. Our house was still in its primitive mode, and I slept on a carpenter's bench out on the porch to keep cool.

Julio Kaplan

The Puerto Rico Opens were great fun, just as the US Open there had been. Reduced airfares and good prize money brought a planeload of strong players from New York, and I enjoyed guiding some of my old friends to bargain restaurants, casinos and tourist sights. (Mimi and I always traveled to Cooper via a Puerto Rico stopover and thus had gained familiarity with the attractive island.)

Once a future grandmaster still in his teens had apparently taken virile notice of the available streetwalkers, and he asked me whether the hotel concierge would be a problem if he wanted to take a woman up to his room. The young man's inexperience was obvious, and I later wondered whether he had lost his virginity there in San Juan.

At one of these tournaments I was pleased to see Larry Gilden, a high-spirited and high-rated friend from the flea house who often gained high prizes in major US Swiss Opens. In those days he was as impoverished as I had been, and was helped by playing some money games at Fursa's.

In this island tournament Larry had rightfully expected to win part of the top money but events broke badly for him, and in the last round we were paired, battling for $200. Surprisingly I won, a fine result for me, but a disastrous result for Larry. How much of a disaster I was soon to learn, for Larry confided that he had invested all he had to attend this tournament, with the entirely reasonable expectation of a profit. But his investment consisted of a *one-way plane* ticket, and he now had no means to return to New York! I took Larry to see Jaime Sitiriche, one of the tournament organizers, and the upshot was that Jaime and I split the cost of Larry's return ticket. I admired Larry's courage.

Through our frequent stopovers in San Juan en route to the BVI, I had become familiar with the Puerto Rican chess scene. On weekends blitz games could be found in a wide hallway at the Luxurious Caribe Hilton hotel. On the other side of a glass wall was a beautiful little park with flamingos and peacocks strutting around. It was undoubtedly one of the most picturesque chess sites in the world! Alas, after a number of delightful years the hotel evicted us.

The hub of Puerto Rican chess activity in those days was architect Tony Higuera's apartment in the stylish Condado section of San Juan. Expert-strength Tony virtually held an open house for us, and we played on a pleasant balcony one floor above busy Ashford Avenue. Among those frequenting the site were brothers Arturo and Miguel Colon, Angel Berrios, Julio Kaplan and Narciso Rabell Mendez. Narciso then was a good-looking dynamic young man who owned four gasoline stations and was the head of the Puerto Rico Chess Federation. I believe he was instrumental in the organization of the 1965 US Open and the subsequent Puerto Rico Opens, and was the Puerto Rico delegate at FIDE congresses. He prospered, and having been smitten by things European, he built a delightful Austrian chalet behind his house, complete with two huge barrels of Austrian wines. Unfortunately the wine in one of the barrels spoiled almost immediately in the tropical climate. (I'd had a similar experience when three beautiful inlaid-wood chess boards cracked just weeks after I brought them from Costa Rica to the US.) Narciso was a whirlwind organizer, being very active in hemisphere affairs, and later in 1990 he ran unsuccessfully for the FIDE presidency.

Aside from Puerto Rican chess, I took great interest in the casinos around San Juan. I played blackjack at every brief pass-through visit with some success, and so it came to pass that I went to San Juan with a modest grubstake, rented an apartment for three months, painted during the day and played blackjack at night. Astonishingly, Mimi agreed to this!

Of course, I kept in touch with the local chess players, usually going to Tony Higuera's place before dinner and a casino. The Puerto Ricans were wondering about the reason for my being there, and when they learned the location of my apartment, someone had an imaginative inspirational flash, and his speculative theory was soon transformed into an accepted fact. It so happened that my third floor rooftop apartment overlooked Narciso Rabell's house, just a few doors down on the opposite side of the street. And it was also true that Narciso's name was identical to that of a well-known left wing political activist. So when these two facts were put together with the need for an explanation of my presence in San Juan: 'Ai caramba! The gringo is with the CIA, sent to keep an eye on Narciso Rabell!' That it was the *wrong* Narciso Rabell was shrugged off as a typical CIA blunder. It took quite some time for this rumor to be dispelled.

I thoroughly enjoyed the nightly blackjack encounters at the various casinos, adopting the mindset of a lone heroic battler against the powerful sinister *HOUSE*. The characteristics of the many dealers became familiar; the friendly ones, the oblivious or indifferent ones who were more comfortable to play against, and those few who inadvertently displayed an antagonistic stance toward the customers, sometimes backing it up with hard-to-detect manipulation. Of course this last category of dealer was to be avoided; choosing one's battles is a priority of any serious combatant. Maintaining a low profile was desirable, so my play was scattered about the different casinos as much as possible. Card counting itself was fairly easy; contrary to the general impression no feats of memory are required, only a facility for rapid addition and subtraction; I could keep up with the fastest dealers.

My grubstake was deposited in the local Banco Popular, withdrawals were made as needed for apartment rent, food and gambling. Results were initially favorable but the theoretical gambler's edge was minuscule, and as the weeks went by a rather serious downturn occurred. As with business, most failures are due to lack of sufficient capital investment, and my gambling venture was definitely under-financed. As the depletion of funds became critical toward the end of the designated three-month period, I called Mimi and she sent an additional $600 (1960's dollar values) to the Banco Popular account, all that we could afford at the time. My original grubstake was already lost, so I withdrew the $600, leaving a small amount in the bank for necessary expenses until my return to New York a week hence. Two more nights of drama at the tables and then everything was gone. The next morning, thinking despondently of having to face Mimi with my failure, I went to close out the bank account. Astonishingly, instead of the expected $147, there was $747 available! Confused, and not daring to think about why this had occurred, I withdrew all of the money and returned to the casinos that night.

Had I then lost again, this bizarre episode would have seemed a purposeless twist of fate, but those who subscribe to Design in the universe will be happy to learn that a marvelous winning streak was bestowed upon me, and I returned home to Mimi with an overall profit for the venture! Of course, after a few weeks we received a letter from Banco Popular, and after refusing their request for interest we returned the extra $600. We didn't mind at all, magnanimously excusing their mistake!

In the 42nd Street club one evening, I became aware of six young Puerto Ricans. They told me that they had come to the US for a Pan American student teams tournament which had just ended. Their return flight was scheduled for next morning, and rather than spend money on a hotel, they were planning to stay up all night at the club! Of course I offered to let them sleep on our apartment floor (we had only one couch) and they gratefully accepted. After sharing some Cuban food, I took them to our home, where Mimi graciously took it all in stride.

In 1968 I learned to drive, at the age of 43. That's quite late, but for many years I had been so poor that a car was out of the question, and even if it was affordable, owning a car in New York can be an outright nuisance, what with alternate street parking, heavy fines, steep garage fees and traffic jams. Now, we occasionally borrowed Mimi's mother's car when we visited her in Pennsylvania.

We decided to take a short trip to New England, during the course of which we wanted to belatedly accept an invitation offered to us by E.M. Reubens, a gentle old man with a saber cut scar. He lived in a large house with two relatives and had said, 'Come up anytime, we have plenty of room.' Now when we called he seemed strangely reticent, and went off to confer with the couple who lived with him. After a little delay he returned to the phone and warmly renewed his invitation. We learned the reason for his hesitation upon our arrival.

It was a presidential election year and a fund raising event was being held at E.M.'s home for one of the national candidates, whom we met in due course. The place was filled with people, and at the appropriate time we all went to a large orchard and somehow Mimi and I found ourselves picking blueberries for the benefit of the Communist Party! Someone later suggested that a high percentage of the attendees probably belonged to the FBI.

It may have been on this same trip that I played in a weekend tournament (won by Bent Larsen) and at one point Mimi sat next to my game, never uttering a word. But finally my exasperated opponent objected to the clicking noise of her knitting needles!

A National Open Tournament in Nevada was coming up, and a bargain airfare was available for a stay of up to 30 days. So Mimi and I agreed that I would go and try my luck at blackjack after the chess was finished. I made an optimistic reservation for the full month.

The tournament was held in Lake Tahoe, a beautiful resort area in northern Nevada. Between rounds I either walked along the lakeshore with friends or made tentative forays into the casino. At one point my sudden bet increases attracted attention, and the dealer asked, 'What's your name, mister?' I was about to answer with an alias when a well-meaning friend said, 'He's Bill Hook.' So much for maintaining an anonymous posture!

I shared a table once with GM Larry Evans, who had reportedly become an expert in blackjack in the lucrative days before the casinos knew anything about card counters. After just a few minutes observation, his skill at the game was apparent.

After the chess tournament ended, most everyone had gone except Larry who had recently moved to nearby Reno, and is living there still, in the next century. We didn't see much more of each other then, because blackjack is basically a solitary venture, but he did show me Harold's casino in Reno. Larry had mentioned being smitten with a woman he'd just met, and as we descended an escalator he pointed her out, a very attractive blackjack dealer. Ingrid at that time was a recent émigré from Germany, and after marrying Larry she became deeply involved in the arts, doing critical reviews as well as being an abstract painter. She reveals a fine intelligence in her criticism, painting and conversation.

Harold's casino delighted me. It was a large, rambling two-story building filled with memorabilia from the Old West. An easy informality prevailed, in sharp contrast to the Puerto Rican casinos, which required jackets and ties at that time. Despite the relaxed atmosphere, tense gambling battles occurred, and I was later told that the casino kept four stretchers on hand for customers who would suddenly collapse at their table or slot machine!

And it was a very grim battle that I was about to engage in. I was risking what was to us a substantial amount of money, and I felt under considerable pressure to justify Mimi's agreement to do this. We did have the reassuring result of a profit from my three months of gaming in San Juan, but that needed a bizarre bank error to turn things around at the very end. And even in the best of circumstances, a skilled professional who played perfectly and was able to detect subtle advantageous situations could still lose very easily, so closely balanced were the odds.

The rules of blackjack were more favorable to the player in Nevada than in Puerto Rico, and I could make betting and playing strategy decisions instan-

taneously, and accurately. The problem was that making instantaneous plays was exactly what I must *not* do. The Nevada pit bosses and dealers were as knowledgeable about the game as the best players, and any sign of expertise in a customer alerted them to the possibility of his being a card counter, and perhaps a pro.

Once a counter was clearly identified, the casinos had defensive measures at their disposal. In the old days intimidation was used, but times have changed. Now when a counter is detected the casino might bar him from the premises, unless they determine that the customer is playing so ineptly that they would be better off by simply tolerating him. Barring a player is a casino's prerogative; the Nevada Casino Control Commission offers little or no protection to customers in this area.

A less drastic method of neutralizing card counters is to shuffle the decks more often. (As hands are dealt out the counter can determine whether the remaining cards are favorable or unfavorable for the players. Sometimes the most auspicious betting chances are found near the end of the decks. Thus shuffling early stifles these opportunities.) The casinos cannot use this tactic with impunity, however, as many amateur gamblers become impatient with frequent shuffling, and go elsewhere.

Always available to the casinos in their ceaseless vigilance against counters are the bulbous obtrusions in their ceilings, which contain cameras, and the use of casino personnel posing as customers in order to facilitate a close observation of the suspects.

I was not a professional, but I had a good games mind and had read books by pros, so I knew enough to be of concern to a casino.

Compared to chess, blackjack is quite simple. Theoretically, all one has to do is make minimal bets until the deck becomes clearly favorable, and then drastically increase the amounts, ideally to 50 or more times the original wager. The problem is this type of dramatic bet fluctuation immediately alerts the dealers that a card counter is at work. So compromises in betting strategy are forced. Just as one should not count obviously, one cannot bet obviously. Blending in with the other customers is necessary, avoiding detection is paramount. So among card counters, blackjack itself is merely a framework for the *real* game, the game *around* the game.

Things had seemed much simpler in Puerto Rico, despite the poorer rules. Now I had to be much more concerned with role-playing, counting while seeming not to, playing hesitantly, carrying on trifling conversations, body language, and avoidance of fleeting, telltale expressions. Certainly this was a different kind of challenge for a games person!

I blundered almost immediately. Reno had a number of other casinos where playing blackjack seemed feasible and I tried them briefly, but never

felt as comfortable as at Harold's. That casino entranced me, and so I ended up playing there exclusively. A major error. In the effort to avoid being noticed by casino personnel, the pros recommend following 'the milk route', hopping from casino to casino and spreading out your action so that a gap of at least several days elapses between visits to any one casino.

I certainly knew of this, but so enjoyed being at Harold's that I tried to compromise by playing in all three shifts of the 24-hour casino. And this seemed to work, although it deprived me of sleeping time.

Throughout this venture, I remained intent on my goal of winning as much as possible, and so used what basketball players would call a 'full court press'. Playing, eating, sleeping, and nothing else, day after day. My sessions at the tables were too long, and fatigue probably impaired my accuracy. Game theorists advocate a mini-max strategy; mine was undoubtedly a maximum effort. I knew a lot, but lacked discipline; definitely not a professional performance.

As it was, I survived at Harold's for eleven days, with moderate profitability. Then I sat down to play at Ingrid's table, which had no other customers. Larry Evans had briefly introduced me to her, and I found playing at her table more relaxing in that she was clearly not one of the 'enemy'.

The deck became favorable, and then extraordinarily favorable. I increased my bet as much as I dared and was dealt two picture cards for a total of 20 against Ingrid's 8. This is a fine hand and one would almost always stand pat. But my count told me the remaining deck was extremely rich in high cards, so I split the tens, doubling my already high bet. On this supposedly foolish play I drew an ace on each hand, giving me two winning hands of twenty-one, a startling result.

It then took just a few minutes for a pit boss to come and whisper in Ingrid's ear. 'After every hand?', she asked. He nodded, and went away. Thereafter Ingrid was compelled to shuffle the decks after each hand, effectively destroying the value of my card counting. It was clear that I had been under surveillance by the ceiling cameras, perhaps for some time because of my continual play in Harold's. And it was evidently my splitting of the picture cards that confirmed their suspicions of me as a counter. I was chagrined, and after a few pointless hands, left the casino. Playing just the other two shifts worked for a day, but then the deck shuffling caught up to me. Reluctantly giving up on Harold's, I flew down to Las Vegas, with a couple of weeks left before my 30-day ticket expired.

There were many more casinos in Vegas, giving me a large choice of stops for a 'milk run', which I resolved to adhere to this time. I did skip around, avoiding too much exposure in any one casino, but I continued to play in parts of 3 shifts, which left me too fatigued to play sharply.

What impelled me to follow such an excessive schedule? Was I still driven by the intense desire to win as much as possible, to justify our dangerous financial gamble? Or was it my combative gamesman's mentality, always eager to do battle and not being able to handle the casinos' 24-hour challenges? I had clearly succumbed to Nevada's gambling spell, going willy-nilly from casino to casino, so perhaps I was in the incipient stage of addiction. Addiction to chess was one thing, and quite acceptable to me, but a gambling habit would be dangerous. These thoughts occurred to me, but my machinery was in high gear and I had no will to push the 'slow' button.

By the time the last week of my 30-day stay started, I'd already learned a few things about Nevada blackjack and these subtle bits of extra knowledge would have made my game more accurate than ever, were it not for the fatigue factor. It's hard to say how badly excessive play affected my results, as most self-made errors are not detected.

At any rate, after being ahead for most of my trip, a series of losses occurred and I entered the last two days slightly behind. Perhaps a prudent bettor at this stage would have exercised some restraint, or 'played for a draw', in chess terms. But I was caught up in the merry-go-round, and made large-scale betting increases instead. Fortunately, I had a nice win on the penultimate day, putting me back in the plus column. This gave me some flexibility in considering my betting strategy options for the last day.

A moderate approach was not considered; it was just a question of how the final all-out effort would be made. The further increases in betting amounts that I planned would probably make me the biggest plunger at whatever table I played, and thereby a focus of attention. This would not fit in with my heretofore strategy of anonymity, and a major adjustment in role-playing had to be made. On the final night of my acting run in Nevada as a supporting player in the betting crowd, circumstances thrust me into the spotlight. I decided to feign drunkenness, reasoning that any inconsistency in acting performance would be attributed to my intoxication. (I afterward learned that this was not a new stratagem, a real pro would have poured a little liquor into his shirt beforehand, so the manifest odor would support the deception.) So in the early evening I entered my favorite casino, resolving to play until it was time to go to the airport, around 10 a.m.

Two things had to go right; my new acting role, and of course the gambling results. Several weeks as a supporting player had been good preparation. There was no stage fright, or table fright. I played slowly, fumbling my chips, slurred my speech, tried to look bleary-eyed, and talked drunk-speak. This somehow worked for about 15 hours, a marathon performance! (Good Sitzfleisch, too.)

As for the all-important gambling result, things could scarcely have gone better. The table had a series of fine winning streaks for the players through

out the night, and even when the inevitable downturns came I still managed to get winning hands while the others lost. Enormous piles of chips accumulated in front of me, twice forcing the pit bosses to clean house by filling up containers and going to the cashier's window for me. In retrospect, it's incredible that this bonanza continued for 15 hours! In the previous weeks of constant gambling I had never had a remotely comparable winning streak. The way this occurred on the last night, when the stakes were higher, led me to wonder whether the gods of chance had a taste for the melodramatic!

It was wonderful to arrive home and tell Mimi of our big win, and she rejoiced, but said I looked terrible. The weeks of constant tension and little sleep had indeed worn me down; it took several days to feel somewhat normal.

Once recovered, I tried to put this blackjack thing in perspective. I had engaged in two all-out efforts to win money, and won in both instances. But in Puerto Rico the fluky bank error saved me, and in Nevada I was losing money just two days from the end. The final fabulous win could just as easily have been a disastrous loss. I had been just plain lucky.

The lure was certainly there for me, but dependable profits were not. I would continue to play blackjack occasionally for enjoyment, but not with serious intent. In future years I enjoyed some blackjack tournaments, but never won any major prize.

Olympiads

It was a long two years' wait, but the 1968 Olympiad finally arrived, and our USVI team was actually there! (Now you can see why my winning of the Tiffany painting grant affected my chess life more than my painting career, which was going nowhere.) On this occasion the island government paid for our air fares and gave us each a pair of gold(!) pants, flags, emblems, and tourist brochures to hand out. For subsequent events we paid our own passage, while the host countries always furnished room and lodging. In 1968 the event was held in Lugano, Switzerland, a beautiful lake town surrounded by mountains, and 53 countries participated.

At the outset a loud, flashily dressed Iranian was to have been joined by his team, but they never came. 'Un catastrophe!', he moaned. The USSR had recently invaded Czechoslovakia, and I met Czechs Lubosh Kavalek and Ludek Pachman, who had just defected. All except one of the Czech team wore black armbands in mourning for their country. (Cold war politics was prevalent at the Olympiads in those days.)

Designated first board for the USA, Bobby Fischer came and saw the crowded conditions, then left the team when he was not allowed to play his games in a secluded area. Team captain Donald Byrne (Robert's brother) filled in and scored well.

In those days the Olympiads used seeding to create equally balanced preliminary sections who played a round robin; then the top two teams of each group entered the group 'A' final, the next two went into group 'B', etc. The matches were played on four boards, and most teams had two alternates, but some of the poorer federations sent only 4 or 5 players.

It was my first glimpse of most of the world-famous grandmasters who were there, and I was particularly intrigued by the powerful Soviet team of Petrosian, Spassky, Polugaevsky, Kortchnoi, Smyslov and Geller. Participation in such an event with these greats was complete bliss for me.

I had a happy start, defeating the first boards of Greece, Sweden and Morocco, and drawing with Grandmaster Westerinen of Finland, but then lost to the two strong teams of our group, East Germany and Argentina. My inexperienced teammates were meanwhile struggling.

On one of our rest days some of our team decided to rent a car for some sightseeing. Since I was the only one who had brought along a valid license, I took care of the formalities and slid behind the wheel when we were ready. But this was my very first experience with a standard shift car, and after a number of stalls we were still in the parking lot! The concerned proprietor

came out to see what the difficulty was, and worriedly asked whether we intended to drive on mountain roads. After reassuring him I managed to put the car in motion, but the problem persisted, and when we came to a major intersection I stalled again, with a visibly steaming motor. At this point the most practical of my license-less teammates dashed around to change seats with me while numerous beeping horns celebrated the move, and we then drove on to Lake Como without incident.

The strong Soviets easily won the gold medal, scoring 39½-12½ in the 14-team final. Yugoslavia was 2nd with 31 points, Bulgaria 3rd with 30, and the USA at 29½. The USVI scored 11-29 in their weak eleven-team final, finishing 52nd out of the 53 teams. My results were 3½-2½ in the preliminary section, but only 5-5 in the lowly final.

All in all it was a magnificent experience, and we made worldwide friendships, which were to be renewed every two years in subsequent Olympiads. In February 1969, *Chess Life* magazine published a report of mine on the Olympiad as seen from the perspective of a weaker team.

Back on 42nd Street, a group of us toyed with the idea of our club seceding from the US and sending our own team to the Olympiad. We estimated that we could defeat at least half of the countries!

Several years previously there had been a trumpeter musician who came around regularly. His chess game was not strong, and his contributions to our group discussions were not noteworthy, but he was quite genial. Then he fell upon hard times and for a year or two you could see him deteriorate; his clothing became threadbare, he was often unshaven and his spirits were depressed. The downward slide seemed irreversible when he abruptly disappeared. But now, after some years' absence, he reappeared, bright and shiny and wearing a religious collar! We were all stunned on two counts: one, that he had been able to recover from his hopelessly lost position, and two, that he was now assuming responsibility for guiding other people's lives when his own had seemed to be in such disarray. Then I recalled my own chaotic young years and reflected that perhaps only those who had experienced the battle could fully understand the true nature of the war. (Our friend disappeared again, presumably back to the flock.)

In 1969, one of the flea house's own, Walter Browne, was given a last-minute entry into a major tournament in Puerto Rico. We were both surprised and delighted when he finished a close second to Spassky.

A very small number of restless young players had started coming around, and would generally hang out in the ex-ping-pong room. Although loners, they would share their world view there, which seemed to reflect the growth

of violence in our society. One young Karate expert put his fist through the thin wall. I happened by the group once, and one said, 'Hook doesn't understand us.' He was right. Two of them fought, and crashed through the wall tumbling into the club's main room. When repairs were made, the opening was taken advantage of, and a second door was constructed. It was known thereafter as the '... memorial arch', after one of the adversaries.

In one incident, I pulled off an assailant who was unfairly pummeling another on the floor. But except for one fine old Austrian man who was struck by his opponent, the other players were really not affected by the fractious ones. It was a part of life which went on in the background and occasionally ruffled their games.

In 1969 Mimi got a job offer she couldn't refuse from the Brookings Institution, known as a 'think tank' and located in Washington DC. We were devastated at having to leave New York, and for a few years we concocted various excuses to make return visits to the big city, even retaining our dentist, and I dropped in at the club as often as possible.

When we moved to Maryland (just outside Washington) my first chess contact was Earl Shara, whom I knew from an earlier time in Fisher's. Earl later became active in backgammon, and became known as 'the Silver Fox' after his blond hair turned white. He put me in touch with the local chess players, but a monthly blitz couldn't compare with New York chess. However, the Washington area in 1969 was just beginning a period of dramatic development, culturally, epicurean, and chessic, and it has become a delightful place to live. Several strong players from Fisher's (Larry Kaufman, Larry Gilden and Fred Turim) enlivened the local chess scene.

My Virgin Islands connection would continue to earn great chess dividends over the years, and in 1969 I was fortunate to play in a FIDE Zonal tournament in Ecuador, accompanied by Mimi. En route we found a marvelous chess club in Bogotá, Columbia. There were about 60 players who kept three serving girls busy with sandwiches, coffee, etc., and several strong blitzers kept me occupied.

At the Zonal in Quito (a picturesque city) a 67% score would mean an automatic International Master Title, but I didn't come close nor would I at the three other Zonals I would play in, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico or Cuba. But in each case the spirit was festive, the chess good and hard, and I loved the traveling. There were occasional high points; in the final round I enabled Cuban GM Eleazar Jimenez to go on to the Interzonal when I drew with his close rival. This sort of a low-key achievement was quite enough for me, I felt lucky just to be there. Speaking of lucky, Miguel Colon of Puerto

Rico and I went to a casino in Quito, and we somehow found a nickel slot machine which paid back much more than it should have. We had a great time for a while; the management noticed and became agitated, but we simply shooed them away. We finally got tired of it, and an attendant immediately covered the machine after we stopped. Then when the tournament moved to Guayaquil, I tried some blackjack in that city's casino. Of note here was that there were frequently used brass spittoons, and that the card decks were changed just once a week! After a few days the curved, overused cards were shuffled with considerable difficulty.

In 1970 I played in the Pan-American Tournament in Havana, to which each country sent one player. The US was not represented. Just going to Cuba then was a bit adventurous for an American citizen. The US trade embargo of Cuba had been in effect for some years (as it still is), but the political tensions were sharper at that time, since the Cold War had not yet ended. I applied for official permission to make the trip, the US State Department approved, and since there were no direct flights I had to go via Mexico City and obtain travel documents there. I thought it would just be a routine matter, but the reception room was filled with people beseeching a couple of harried clerks. My plans for some leisurely sight-seeing were foiled; by the third day I was as frantic as the other applicants and it was just a few hours before the flight when they finally walked me through a door to get the necessary papers. It was like a scene out of a Kafka novel; the inner room was huge and the walls were covered with ceiling-high shelves that were filled with voluminous files of paper work. Just three desks were occupied, and two of the three clerks were reading comic strips!

In Havana we stayed at the Havana Libre Hotel (formerly the Havana Hilton), where the furnishings and plumbing fixtures were showing signs of deterioration because replacements could not be gotten from the US. Garlic was also unobtainable, a disaster for Latino cooking! A national holiday occurred during the tournament; the date commemorated the assault which had started the Cuban revolution. The celebration lasted a full week, during which time the streets became sticky from all of the free beer that was distributed. To cap it off Fidel Castro gave a three-and-a-quarter-hour speech before a huge throng in an open field. We chess players were taken to some steps in front of the podium and given earphones that could be tuned to simultaneous translations in five different languages. The speech was extraordinary in that Fidel admitted to a major failure in completely candid terms. The previous year a decision was made to go all out to produce a massive sugar harvest. To accomplish the goal of 10,000,000 tons it would be neces-

sary to take students, factory workers and many others from their normal activities and have them put in as many hours as possible in the cane fields. The other aspects of the economy would naturally suffer, but the government reasoned that the foreign exchange gained from sugar would make it worthwhile. Now the harvest was in and it had fallen significantly short of their goal, and Fidel took full responsibility for the failure. He was able to do so because there was no opposition party waiting to pounce on his government's mistakes. I dare say that no politician in a Western democracy could admit to an equivalently major blunder and have his government survive the opposition's attacks.

While I found Fidel's candor refreshing as compared with the evasive, hedging speeches of US politicians, the loss of our free elections would be far too high a price to pay for this slight advantage.

The second part of Castro's speech was a bit macabre. Two years previously the legendary Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara had been killed by government forces in Bolivia while trying to organize an insurrection there. The Bolivians put Che's body on display for a while but before he was buried someone managed to cut off Che's hands and make off with them. Now Castro made the dramatic announcement that after two years the hands of this beloved martyr had arrived in Cuba. He suggested a suitable memorial museum to display the relics.

The tournament was played in our hotel, in the same large hall where the 1966 Olympiad took place. Before play started, we were all interviewed on Cuban television, but thanks to recent Latino tournaments, my limited Spanish had improved, so this was only a moderately embarrassing experience. The same might be said of my chess result; the few points I scored were in keeping with low expectations, and mitigated only by a win over the Argentinean representative. Moderately embarrassing, but I had a whale of a time.

I stopped in Puerto Rico a little later that year, (probably returning from one of the Caribbean team tournaments), played blackjack till the casino closed at 4 a.m., and then took a morning plane to the BVI, very short of sleep. A Salt Island fisherman gave me a ride, dropping me off at Cooper in mid afternoon. After opening a few shutters, I climbed over the steep hill to see South.

Since our house construction days we had been paying South as a caretaker-gardener, and he had done some wonderful planting and built some durable terracing walls without mortar. Every year that we came to Cooper we were happy to renew our ties to this old friend, so I was eager to see him once again on this unexpected visit. His failing eyes didn't recognize me until I came quite close, and he appeared bloated, saying that the gas was giving

him problems, but he was delighted to see me, and he would come over in the morning. Despite my fatigue I stayed up late, savoring a drink on our darkened porch. There was a sense of movement in the gloom and I pointed a flashlight on one of South's planted papaya trees, and there was a rat's hindquarters sticking out of a ripened fruit.

I slept eleven hours, and upon waking found South stretched out on our path, a horde of flies buzzing around his head. He was clearly dead, and as I covered him with a sheet I shouted out emotionally 'you were a great man, South!' I ran up to the top of the hill and yelled the news to South's son John, who immediately went to his boat, while South's wife and daughter started running up the hill. There was no phone, and John first went to nearby Salt, and then to Tortola to notify the authorities. A boat came from Salt, and the women who were familiar with occasional deaths out on the cays bound South's facial openings, and then we all sat to wait, each with our own memories of the dead man. When the government launch came for South I went too, and as I stepped onto the Road Town jetty, someone laughingly said 'you're crying!' 'He was my friend.'

The burial was on Salt Island with Mimi arriving from the US just in time for the ceremony. We both returned to the States, and just one week later South's stalwart wife Maria died, and Mimi flew down for that funeral as well.

Later in 1970 the Virgin Islands team played in our second Olympiad in Siegen, West Germany, and I was surprised to find Walter Browne playing first board for Australia. Walter was born in that country and would represent them in two Olympiads before starting to play for the US in these events. At the beginning two teams showed up from one of the Latin-American countries, where there was a bitter rift in their federation. A hurried FIDE ruling was made, and one of the teams had to return home. What a terrible disappointment for them! I have since learned that three other teams were sent away because the Germans had only made provision for 60 entrants, and they refused to accommodate any more! A disgraceful incident.

This time Bobby Fischer, fresh from some dazzling tournament victories, was with the American team. Ed Edmondson, the USCF executive director, told me, 'Bobby wants to play every game.'

Imagine my delight, when the Virgin Islands found ourselves in a preliminary section with the US, and I was paired against Bobby! We shook hands when we sat down to play and he said, 'It's been a long time.' I told him about our isolated island home, he said 'it sounds nice' and we started the game while he wolfed down a huge sandwich. Most unusually for him, Bobby fell thirty minutes behind on the clock, but later took advantage of a

subtle inaccuracy, and wrapped up the point with a killing combination. Later he said I had a good opening and he graciously showed me where I had then erred.

Bobby was fast becoming a threat to the World Championship crown then held by the Soviet Boris Spassky, so when they were paired against each other in the Olympiad finals it was a moment of high drama. With Cold War prestige also at stake for their respective countries, spectators were jam-packed around the match. Spassky won this one and Bobby would have to wait for his time of glory.

The Soviets had the same lineup that had devastated the opposition in Lugano by 8½ points. In this final stage they again won, but only came ahead of Hungary by one point. The leading scores of the finals were USSR 27½, Hungary 26½, Yugoslavia 26, and USA 24½. England's superb first board, Jonathan Penrose, collapsed during the preliminaries and had to return home. Their weakened team then was only able to qualify for the 'C' finals group. Out of 60 participating countries, the US Virgin Islands came in 58th. My results were 1½-7½ in the preliminaries, and 5½-4½ in the finals, 7-12 overall.

With hotel space short in Siegen, many of the teams were housed in nearby country inns with a chauffeured van for each group. The Virgin Island's driver was a personable young man named Hartmut and when we bemoaned our losses and apologized for his having to carry around a bunch of losers, he indignantly said, 'I am PROUD of my team!' His loyalty moved all of us. Hartmut later invited the team to his home for a festive dinner. Since half our team was black it was particularly gratifying to see no sign of the racism formerly associated with Germans.

One of our team members who attracted a lot of attention was Andy Scherman, who at age 12 was then the youngest ever to play in an Olympiad. After Siegen he and his family moved back to the US but still retained a keen interest in VI chess. In 1971, when the VI team was playing in a tournament in Central America, I called a team meeting to urge Andy's participation in the 1972 Olympiad. I organized the meeting because the head of our federation, Julio Francis Edwards, was not there, and I felt the matter should be brought up. Well, when Julio Francis heard about it he took umbrage for my 'acting without authority'. I soon learned that I was required to play in a qualifying tournament for the next Olympiad trip even though that had not been deemed necessary before, since I was clearly the strongest player. We were living in the US most of the time then, but I expressed a willingness to go to the islands for one or two weeks to qualify. But Julio Francis scheduled the qualifier over six or seven weeks, knowing that I could not come for that

length of time. In short, Julio manipulated me off the team, and I was devastated when in 1972 the Virgin Islands went off to the Skopje Olympiad without me. My friend Walter Hoyt was incensed, and did not go either. According to reports the Yugoslav event was one of the best ever. The Virgin Islands 'team' finished a distant last, having to use the pregnant wife of one of the players and recruiting someone else at the event in order to meet the minimum requirement of four boards.

In more recent years, a generation later, another type of power play has squeezed three higher-rated qualified players off the US Virgin Islands team, resulting in needlessly poor Olympiad results. That's absolutely counter to the established tradition of each country sending their best.

In the early 70's Lubomir Kavalek, whom I had met briefly at the Lugano Olympiad, immigrated to the US and took up residency in the Washington DC area. We played each other in a local weekend tournament and afterward Lubosh and his wife Irena came to dinner at our apartment, thus beginning a friendship which has strengthened over 30 years.

There was another foreign-born chess player whom I became friendly with about this time. He was Lev Zaitsev, a low-rated master like me, and he was the cultural attaché at the Soviet embassy. He and his wife came to dinner, and we once invited him for a weekend on the Eastern shore of Maryland, but he had to decline because our State department limited Soviet embassy personnel to a 25-mile circle around Washington. Lev returned to his country after a while, and it was many years later that an ex-Soviet grandmaster told me that he knew that Zaitsev had been a member of the KGB.

1972 was the year Bobby Fischer won the World Championship in a dramatic struggle with Soviet Boris Spassky. In great part due to the Cold War political overtones of the match, the event created headline news coverage throughout the world. Bobby was featured on the covers of *Time*, *Life*, and *Newsweek*, and was given a ticker-tape parade in New York after his victory. Charlie Hidalgo, who ran the Chess House on 72nd Street in New York, hung a banner across that wide street hailing Bobby's triumph.

Even the Brookings Institution took notice. An informal seminar was organized to discuss the 'Fischer phenomenon', and taking part were famous scholars Charles Schultz, Jim Perry and others then attached to Brookings. Also included in the meeting was the well-known chess enthusiast I.S. Turover, and I was there to tell of my many over-the-board encounters with Bobby. I enjoyed the atmosphere.

The prestigious think tank was occasionally inclined to such seemingly quirky deviations from its scholarly output. When famed gambler Jimmy the

Greek was invited to speak, it raised a few eyebrows, and I heard a high Brookings official challenge Jimmy, suggesting that his profession was socially non-productive. The gambler undoubtedly did not expect that sort of treatment when he accepted the invitation.

In June of 1972 Mimi left the Brookings Institution to work for the President's Council of Economic Advisors. The good news was that she had a prestigious position and she was given a huge office in the Old Executive Office Building next to the White House. There was a fireplace, leather couch, etc., and the resident carpenter even fashioned a beautiful frame so she could hang one of my paintings. Another perquisite was occasional access to the President's box at the Kennedy Center when it was not in use.

The bad news was that Mimi was working for an administration which she did not favor, and her reports on economic developments frequently came back edited with a political spin that distorted the natural interpretation of the statistics. In this regard, she was not happy.

In June 1973 Mimi inherited some money when her aunt Carrie died. The legacy enabled us to leave our apartment for a modest house, an upgrade which had not seemed possible as all our resources were tied up in developing our Cooper Island home.

To alleviate the financial drain of Cooper, we decided to rent that house through an agency in Tortola. We were informed that our first tenant was a Doctor Brown from Florida who was there with some Puerto Rican friends. Doctor Brown told the realtor that the isolation of Cooper was conducive to a book he was writing, and he enjoyed boating with his friends.

After a couple of months our island neighbors wrote that the tenants were leaving some of our furniture outside (which we didn't like), so Mimi decided to fly down on a weekend to check things out. She found the tenants away on their boat, and new locks on our doors. After gaining entry, one of our closets was found to contain 1300 pounds of marijuana! Of course Mimi notified the BVI police immediately, and they took the stuff away. We considered ourselves lucky, because if this illegal operation had not been reported by the owner and discovered in some other way, our property might have been confiscated.

That year I was beckoned West by a juxtaposition of two very attractive chess tournaments, the National Open in Las Vegas, followed by the annual Lone Pine tournament in California. (Mimi was understanding as usual.) The liberal prize monies offered were bound to draw fields of strong players, and this was particularly appealing to me. In the first tournament I was paired with 17-year-old Tony Miles, a future world-class GM from England. Our game came down to a king and pawns ending, in which I blundered

away a sure draw, and wound up with my usual 4-2 result. The tournament was won by Hungarian GM Laszlo Szabo. Lubosh and Irena Kavalek were there, and seemed bewildered by the Las Vegas casino atmosphere. They were particularly puzzled by the game of craps, so I bought ten one-dollar chips at an empty table to show them how it was played. A long series of successful points followed, and the Kavalek's eyes grew wider and wider as my bets were increased to take advantage of the run. After just fifteen minutes I cashed out with $515. A very effective lesson, but for some reason they chose not to base a career change on it. There wasn't much time for blackjack, but I saw enough of Las Vegas to know I loved that place.

I caught a ride with Eugene Martinovsky and Walter Shipman to Lone Pine, traveling for hours across Death Valley. Millionaire Lewis Statham had built a mansion in this tiny dusty town at the foot of the Sierra Madre Mountains, and for some years he organized weeklong chess tournaments with irresistible prizes that attracted grandmasters from far and wide. The games were played in the only possible place in Lone Pine, a worn wooden building which normally housed American Legion meetings. Each night the Stathams would invite a different group of chess players to their home for a fine dinner, so by the end of the tournament all of us had sampled their gracious hospitality. His wife was an avid amateur painter, and she took us to her magnificent studio nearby to show us her work, which featured a lot of florals, as I recall. Brahms' alto rhapsody was on her sound system as we entered.

In between the desert-level town and the imposing mountains is an attractive area called the Alabama Hills. Ariel Mengarini and I made the short trek up there to see the locale where many Hollywood westerns were filmed. The huge boulders, trees and cacti are interspersed with open areas ideal for gun battles or fleeing stagecoaches. Arthur Bisguier won the tournament, Walter Browne and Laszlo Szabo tied for second.

After the tournament, GM Larry Christiansen drove the Kavaleks and me to his home, where we stayed overnight before flying back East. Larry is a very talented player, but it seemed that his swimming trophies outnumbered his chess awards.

Over time, I had gotten to know the BVI chess players, a really nice bunch of guys whose natural leader was Carlos Downing, owner of a local newspaper. With the 1974 Olympiad on the horizon and my having no hope of getting on the USVI team, the thought came; why not organize a BVI chess federation? Carlos was enthusiastic, so I obtained a copy of the FIDE statutes and wrote a constitution for the newly born BVI Chess Federation paralleling the FIDE rules as closely as possible to preclude any possible objection to our application for membership. We had luck on our side, for in January 1974 a

World Championship Candidates' match between Boris Spassky and Robert Byrne was being held in nearby Puerto Rico, and FIDE president Max Euwe was attending. Since Euwe was Dutch, our membership application was presented to him by Bram van Dyke, a Dutch engineer who was then working in Tortola. Shortly afterward, we received official notification of our FIDE membership! The BVI players were ecstatic.

Coming down to San Juan with me to watch a couple of the Candidates' games were Mike Senkiewicz and Fred Turim, and then we went to Cooper for a few days. Mike had recently entered the backgammon world; he started by going to Al Roth's club to watch New York's best players over a span of months without playing, simply absorbing. Once he entered the fray, he quickly rose to become one of the world's top ten. Fred and I had played on an intercollegiate chess team in New York, and had resumed contact after I moved to the DC area. Both of my guests were fine blitz players, but one of them balked at playing for a reverse stake of having to do the dishes.

When we next went to Cooper Lubosh and Irena Kavalek came with us. They fell in love with the island, just as we had, and since that first trip they have come again almost every year, for a quarter of a century. Having a grandmaster as a house guest is wonderful for a lesser chess player. It's not just the blitz; one year we played 110 games(!), but sometimes not at all. Strictly as a chess addict, what I have valued most from 'Lubosh's presence in our home are the many stories he told of 'life at the top'. He has the qualifications; once rated among the world's top 10 players, he won or tied for the US Championship five times, was the executive director of the Grandmasters' Association, served as trainer for a number of GMs, including two involved in World Championship battles. Of course Lubosh never revealed any secret analysis, but his vivid descriptions of the great tournaments brought out the personalities of the participants and organizers.

Putting chess aside, sharing the unique environment of Cooper Island is not at all like friends living in the same city, or even the same apartment building. We are in close quarters, all equally subject to the whims of sun, wind and sea conditions. We don't have the option of a casual walk; the cay is very hilly, there are hardly any paths, and the bushes are thorny. There is now a restaurant on the beach three hundred yards away, but to get there one must either swim, scramble over the rocks, or go through the hassle of using our dinghy. (Since our initial year of young carefree adaptability, we only recently acquired a small boat, and upon relearning our seamanship have now attained the rank of inept sea persons, first class.) In the early years of the Kavaleks' visits we had no hot water, and only kerosene or battery lights.

For the above reasons many people accustomed to the conveniences of modern living could not abide this place. Perhaps their dependency upon man-made stimuli would engender a regard for nature as nothing more than an occasionally obtrusive background screen. Here on Cooper, though, nature is the star, performing magnificently, and we are so closely enveloped by the productions as to feel ourselves on stage rather than as a more remote observing audience.

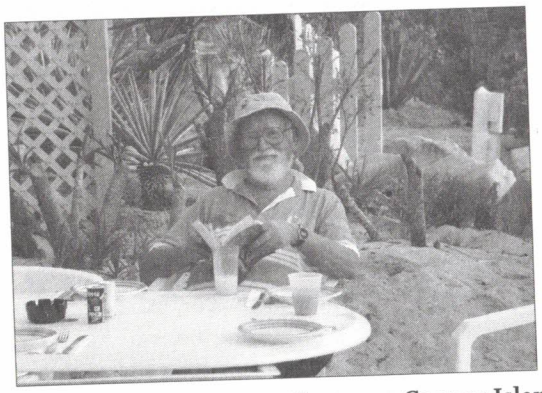
The weather is supremely important here. The sun is intense, and on a windless day it beats down mercilessly, sapping one's energy. There is almost always a good breeze, however, and then everything sparkles and the spirits soar! On many such days we went off with the Kavaleks for a trek around the northern perimeter of the island. (The southern coastline is inaccessible because of sheer cliffs, and is uninhabited for want of a good harbor.) Once past the restaurant and its beach, we would pick our way among the shore's huge boulders, sometimes having to climb, and marvel at the rock formations and each new perspective. The steep hills drop down to a narrow neck of land connecting the island's two halves. This place is called Haulovers because the fishermen used to haul their boats from one side to the other before they had motors. On the eastern coast there is a perpetually strong breeze, and the smaller rocks are strewn with all sorts of things that floated in from down-islands. A Christmas tree was one unlikely find. Going on past an unused beach at Harry Bottom and more rocks, we stop to immerse ourselves in a large bathtub-like pool, which the ocean continuously refreshes. We then come to the Leonard's home on a tiny coral-protected bay, which gives them a snug harbor. When South and Maria were alive the family lived in one shack and had another one for cooking and storage. Their son John has since built a sturdy home, and his energetic Trinidadian wife Jean keeps everything going, caring for their ducks, goats, and hogs, planting their rich bottom land with crops and running a Tortola restaurant called the Roti Palace.

Three hours after we left we return to our cliff top home exhausted, yet the trek has been a stimulus to our spirits. A delighted Finnish guest exclaimed, 'This is an adventure!' At other times we put on blue jeans for leg protection and go up into the hills, usually encountering wild goats and orchids, and our most challenging expedition has been to the top of the big bluff on the southern end of the cay, a taxing four and a half hour journey.

From our porch we can see nine other islands, and a half dozen more if we climb to the hilltop. Boating excursions are a natural attraction, and Norwell often took us about. His nearby Salt Island was named for its ever-renewing salt crop, gleaned from the large brackish pond in the cay's center. Norwell, a master boat mechanic, was the leader of the small community on the island, which numbered twenty-six adults and children when we first arrived.

On the far side of Salt, just one and a half miles from our house, is the spectacular wreck of the 'Rhone', one of the first iron ships, which sank in a hurricane in 1867. Lying at a sharp angle, the bow is on the bottom 85 feet below, while the stern is just 15 feet from the surface, easily reachable with snorkeling equipment. The water is always clear, with the lowest section of the vessel just beginning to be affected by the depth's murkiness, giving a gloomy aspect to the sight. The fishermen call it a mournful place. The ruin was used for the film 'The Deep'.

There are many possible energetic boat excursions, but for those of a more contemplative disposition, fine non-adventurous snorkeling can be found right off our dock. Along with the exotic plants, birds and insects there are the panoramic sunsets and cloud formations. Even rain, usually so prosaic in temperate zones, takes on a magical enchanted quality here. Coming suddenly over the hill behind our house with a quickening wind moving the trees, scattered tentative drops, then pelting torrents immediately creating a delicious smell as the plants and earth are hit. A brief period of intense energy and motion, which just as suddenly subsides. As it moves off across the sea, we then get our first overall view of the precipitating cloud, often accompanied by a rainbow. Such are the pleasures of Cooper Island.



Cooling out with Harry Potter on Cooper Island

Shared experiences like these deepen relationships; perhaps without Cooper our friendship with the Kavaleks would have been more casual. But as it is, the four of us integrate beautifully.

In June our new BVI team met in Nice, France, for the 1974 Olympiad. It was my teammates' first such experience and their spirits were high, while I was glad to put the USVI episode behind me, and play for the country where

my home is. The Olympiad hall was attractive, spacious, and well lit, but the number of spectators was small, as the Riviera in spring is probably more conducive to activities other than chess. We found Nice to be a delightful city with a famous flower market, there was the beach casino, and a generally active nightlife scene, including an attractive young woman with two full-grown cheetahs on a leash!

In the preliminaries against Israel, I was fortunate to defeat Vladimir Liberzon, an ex-Soviet grandmaster. What an exhilarating feeling!

Vladimir Liberzon – Bill Hook

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3+ 6.bxc3 ♕a5 7.♗d2 ♕a4 8.♕g4 ♔f8 9.♖a2 ♘c6 10.♘f3 b6 11.♗d3 ♗a6 12.0-0 ♗xd3 13.cxd3 c4 14.dxc4 ♕xc4 15.♖aa1 ♘a5 16.♕f4 h6 17.♗c1 ♕a4 18.h4 ♘e7 19.h5 ♖c8 20.♗d2 ♕c2 21.c4 ♘b3 22.♖ad1 ♖xc4 23.♗b4 ♔e8 24.♖fe1 a5 25.♗d6 b5 26.g4 ♘c6 27.♔g2 a4 28.♔g3 ♖g8 29.♔g2 g6 30.♕xh6 gxh5 31.♕xh5 ♕g6 32.♕xg6 ♖xg6 33.♔h3 ♘bxd4 34.♘xd4 ♘xd4 35.♖d3 ♘b3 36.f3 ♔d7 37.♔g3 ♖h6 38.♖f1 ♘c5 39.♖dd1 ♖c3 40.♔f4 ♖h3 41.♗xc5 ♖xc5 42.♖d3 ♖h2 43.♔g5 ♔e7 44.♖b1 ♖h8 45.♖d4 ♖g8+ 46.♔h4 ♖c4 47.♖d3 ♖h8 48.♔g5 ♖g8+ 49.♔h4 ♖b8 50.♔g5 b4 51.axb4 ♖bxb4 52.♖xb4 ♖xb4 53.♖a3 ♖b3 54.♖xa4 ♖xf3 55.♔h6 ♔d7 56.♖a6 ♖e3 57.♖a7+ ♔c6 58.♖xf7 d4 59.g5 d3 60.♖f1 ♔d5 61.g6 ♖g3 62.g7 ♔xe5 63.♖f8 d2 64.♖d8 ♔f6 65.♖f8+ ♔e7 66.♖f1 e5 67.♖d1 ♖g2 68.♔h7 e4 69.g8♕ ♖xg8 70.♖xd2 ♖g4 71.♔h6 ♔e6 72.♔h5 ♖g1 73. resigns.

All of the other team members were newcomers to tournament chess, so we headed straight for the lowest finals group, but enjoying every minute of it. One of our inexperienced teammates lost all sixteen of his games, but had a great time exploring the local bistros. Isaac Kashdan, who had been a consistent high scorer in US Championships of the 30's and 40's, was an arbiter in Nice. Toward the end of the Olympiad he complimented me for my relatively high percentile score, but being aware of his own superb chess career, I could only reply that most of my wins were against weaker chess countries, from, say, our own level. Once I passed by Kashdan when he was speaking to Alexander Kotov, when Soviet GM Kotov said, 'OF COURSE, there is no politics in chess!' and laughed gleefully. (There was incessant political maneuvering in the chess world during the Cold War.)

At the FIDE meetings in Nice the most emotional political issue was the racism practiced in South Africa and Rhodesia, and what should be done about it. Since the official motto of FIDE, Gens Una Sumus, implied a completely integrated membership, any exclusionary practices seemed clearly inadmissible. The only line of defense was that FIDE was solely a chess orga-

nization, and any political decisions were beyond its allowable scope. After some debate, the two countries were ejected from FIDE. South Africa immediately withdrew in protest, but Rhodesia played out their remaining schedule.

More politics – Tunisia refused to play Israel and Algeria and Iraq refused to play Rhodesia. This was permitted, but *only* if the nations involved were at war with their opponents. There was no official state of war, and therefore the refuseniks should have been forfeited 4 to 0. But the FIDE authorities instead decided to award points to the teams based on their expected results according to their ratings. Apparently the rules in this case were adjustable.

Bobby Fischer did not play, and the strong Brazilian GM, Henrique Mecking, quarreled with his team captain, and then returned home after just a few days. My score was 4-5 in the preliminaries, and then 6-2 in our weak final section. The BVI team finished dead last. The USSR, with four World Champions in their lineup, was clearly favored to win the gold medal and they did so in a runaway. They scored 46 points in the tough final section, a full 8½ points ahead of silver medalist Yugoslavia. The USSR team did not lose a single game at Nice, out of 92 played!

Tied for third were Bulgaria and the USA and much more than glory was at stake here. Before the Olympiad the Bulgarians were told that if they won a medal (an unlikely possibility), then each team member would be awarded a car! This was indeed a glittering prize in Bulgaria's depressed economy, and they fought valiantly. But the USA won the tiebreak for the bronze medal.

There only remained the evening party, but what a party! On a beautiful spring night the tables were set under scattered trees, while on the podium four musical groups took turns; two orchestras, a folk music ensemble and a band from the visiting US sixth fleet. The invitations were addressed to the player and 'guest', allowing the enterprising ones to seek out a female companion, a nice French touch. Somehow two young Swiss girls came with the BVI group. The food of course was superb, and the champagne kept flowing. And seeing Petrosian dance with his wife reminded me that there was more to chess players' lives than the circumscribed tournament reports one reads. This terrific party already whetted our BVI players' appetite for the next Olympiad, two years hence.

As Mimi and I settled into our house in Silver Spring, Maryland, we made new friends and developed an assortment of interests in the Washington DC area, which turned out to be a very nice place to live. So our nostalgic trips to New York dwindled until we were finally weaned from the big city.

On one of my later trips around this time I entered the flea house to find John Fursa no longer there. He had sold out to a personable younger man

named Cal Morris. I was sorry that John was gone in that he was basically a good man, but it had been evident in recent years that the burdens of running the business were exacting their toll, and his annual Florida vacations were sorely needed. All of the regular players were still there, though, and the new owner seemed to fit well, so life went on.

A couple of years later came the devastating news that the flea house had closed. An unanticipated rent increase which Cal was unable to absorb was the apparent cause. It's difficult to convey how deeply this affected me. From 1944 at age 19 until I met Mimi in 1955 it was the hub of my universe, a vitally important refuge in my most desperate years of poverty, and a source of warm friendships. It was also a fascinating microcosm of perpetual theatre in which we actors controlled our roles and helped determine the shape of the drama. The scene was most appropriately set by the smoke-stained bilious green walls, the haphazard selection of mismatched functional furniture, and the flooring a mixture of ancient inch-square tiles and heavily worn wood. Long fluorescent tubes provided the bare utilitarian lighting. The setting could hardly be cruder, but it was an essential part of the ambience. It was the richness of characters, though, that made the flea house such a unique, memorable place. Always crowded, there were many men that I saw almost daily for more than twenty years, yet we never spoke to each other, instead finding our own niche of associates among the many to choose from.

In retrospect the pattern of the club's gradual disintegration was apparent. 42nd Street was in decay then, and a higher percentage of questionable characters were hanging around. Even the metamorphosing name from 'The New York Academy of Chess and Checkers' to Fisher's, to Fursa's, to the final despicable 'Flea House' seemed to point to its downfall. Two poignant incidents fittingly marked the last days.

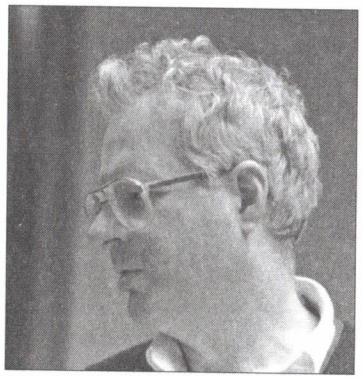
The huge ex-wrestler Kak-Kak entered the narrow vestibule at the foot of the stairs. He was assaulted there by three young hoods, no doubt seeking to rob him. Though over 70 at the time, the wrestler's natural impulse was to fight, but he received a knife wound and died later in the hospital.

Genial matchmaker Rivkin set up a big-money game between Joe Richman and Ivan the Yugoslav, and took part in the betting action. While Rivkin was kibitzing, someone noticed that he looked odd. He was spoken to and tapped on the shoulder with no response. They then laid Rivkin upon the floor and attempted to revive him. The big-money game went on. Medics arrived, covered the body's face, and carried him away. When the game was finally finished, Joe Richman asked, 'Did Rivkin die?' Not too long after that, it was Joe's turn, dying of congestive heart failure.

My memory of flea house faces is vivid, including those I never spoke to, even now from a distance of thirty-two years. An important epoch in US

chess is over but not forgotten. In the year 2000, a quarter century after the closure, an article about the club appeared in the New Yorker magazine! And Andy Soltis recalled the flea house days in his February 2003 column in *Chess Life* magazine.

In 1974, New York-based Bill Goichberg surprised everyone by opening a chess club in Silver Spring, Maryland. Bill's place was only four miles from our house, and its appearance at this time seemed almost intended to fill the void in my chess psyche created by the closing of the flea house. That's probably carrying the idea of design in the universe a bit too far, but the new club was very welcome indeed to all of the Washington DC area players. Bill Goichberg was then (and still is today!) the most dynamic and successful chess organizer in the US. His most renowned tournament is the massive World Open.



Bill Goichberg at the National Chess Congress, 1998

Bill's Silver Spring club was an audacious venture into new territory. Despite its location in a northern suburb of the sprawling Washington DC area, he gauged that the local chess players would support the club, and it would attract interest from nearby Baltimore as well. The drawback was that public transportation to the club was not very convenient, and young kids would be dependent upon their parents for rides. Goichberg stayed around long enough to get things started, and thereupon turned over operation of the club to a manager before returning to his New York home. I was very pleased – weekly blitz tournaments once again!

In 1975 the opportunity arose to play in another Caribbean Zonal tournament, this time in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. Eight years

previously I had played in my first international tournament here, and during the ride from the airport then I'd noticed a peddler holding aloft an automobile seat for sale. This time we passed a peddler (perhaps the same one!) with *two* car seats for sale. With the doubling of inventory it seemed the Dominican Republic economy was improving! Alas, this was not the case with the Dominican Republic Chess Federation, because instead of the comfortable hotel of my earlier visit the players were relegated to stay in a run-down development called 'Villa Olimpica'. The dormitory was designed to house visiting athletes, and the metal bedsprings were so worn they reached halfway to the floor. I tried sleeping out on a small balcony, but was attacked by ants. Aside from these discomforts, the chess was strong, the hosts were warm and it was great meeting old friends again. At age 50, they let me pitch in our baseball game! Chess? Oh yes, the Cubans dominated as usual, and I had another minus score.

Among the twenty-one invitational international events in which I've played, inadequate accommodations occurred only one other time, in El Salvador in 1967. The players there slept on simple cots in a long room, with the teams separated by blankets hung on clotheslines. My teammate Walter Hoyt took one look and easily talked me into sharing a modest hotel room nearby. At that time there were many people sleeping in the streets of the city, and seeing them certainly gave us a sobering perspective on conditions in the poverty-stricken country, and our 'need' for more comfortable beds. On the other hand, the playing site in the El Salvador national library was superb, and General Jimenez, the chief of state, came and shook our hands. Also, the players spent the free day swimming in a beautiful lake within the cone of an extinct volcano, as fine a chess-connected excursion as I've experienced anywhere.

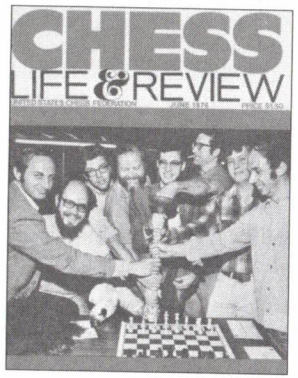
In 1976 a National Chess League was organized by Bill Goichberg. The strongest possible 6-man teams were formed in the nation's large cities, a round-robin schedule was drawn up, and the matches were played by telephone. Operators would send and receive the moves with the time extended, and runners would then dash to the appropriate board to make the move and adjust the clock.

I captained the Washington team and we chose as our sobriquet 'Plumbers', so we were known as the Washington Plumbers. For those of you not well versed in US history of that era, the choice of plumbers as our nickname was very significant and appropriate. In the early 70's Republican Party officials had the Democratic Party headquarters under surveillance from a hotel across the street, and it was decided to sneak into the Democratic offices one night to obtain important political information. The five men involved in the

break-in were caught, much to the Republicans' embarrassment, and the fiasco became known as the Watergate Affair, after the name of the complex housing the Democratic headquarters. The five burglars became known as the Washington Plumbers because they were trying to track down the source of *leaks* to the Democrats.

Newsmen and comedians had great fun with the incident, but things became far more serious when high Republican officials miscalculated and denied knowledge or culpability. The Democrats smelled blood; an intense investigation followed and when evidence of a cover-up reached into the White House, President Nixon was faced with impeachment and chose instead to resign in disgrace. The burglars known as the Washington Plumbers were in the headlines for many months and became part of history. So naming our chess team after burglars was natural and, as it would weirdly turn out, prophetic.

As had been the case throughout US chess history, the strongest players were concentrated in New York, so as the first telephone league season began the New York Threats were the heavy favorites among the nine cities participating. But Washington, with Lubosh Kavalek on first board, started with three successive upsets, defeating Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles. The big match with New York ended in a 3-3 draw, and although the two teams ended the season tied in match points, the Plumbers won the title with a higher game score total, 33 to 31½. The early victories had elevated our spirits, and our morale remained high throughout the season.



Chess Life & Review Magazine with the Plumbers on the cover

The victorious Washington team of the telephone league, grasping their symbol, a plumber's helper. Left to right – Sam Greenlaw, Bob Eberlein, Charley Powell, Bill Hook, John Meyer, Larry Gilden, Mark Diesen, and Lubosh Kavalek.

The 1976 Olympiad was awarded to Israel, and was to be played in Haifa, but there were complications. Israeli-Arab relations were poor, as usual, and although Israel pledged to follow the FIDE requirement of inviting all nations, the Arab countries let it be known that they would not attend. To compound the difficulties the communist bloc of nations announced that they would also boycott the Israeli Olympiad, a Cold War ploy to improve their relations with the Arabs. As if this were not enough, Libya was organizing a counter-Olympiad. To lure poor federations away from Israel the Libyans offered free airfare to their country as well as the usual complimentary food and hotel. This was a considerable temptation to a tiny remote federation such as ours which had no great stake in world politics and none of whose members were wealthy. But the BVI was a British Territory, and our sympathies were naturally with the Western group of nations. Loyalty to FIDE was another factor in our decision to go to Israel despite the considerable transportation costs.

At the opening ceremony prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's presence added to the importance of the occasion. There was a flurry of excitement and applause when a Yugoslav delegate was introduced. We thought that the often maverick nation had sent a team, thus cracking the Communist bloc boycott. This was not so, but even having a single delegate from those countries was gratifying.

The most momentous occurrence at Haifa was the arrival of women's teams. Hitherto men's and women's Olympiads were held separately, and we were all pleased with the new arrangement, and the merging would continue in subsequent events. Some liaisons were quickly formed, and I still remember the skimpy bathing suit worn by a US women's team member as we bounced about playing ping-pong.

Security in Haifa was very tight, and on free-day excursions soldiers armed with machine guns rode on top of the buses. After a couple of matches against strong teams the BVI slipped down to easier opposition and I was able to accumulate a good score. Going into the final round I was leading all top board players and I could have clinched the first prize by simply skipping my final game. But I did play, drawing with a Bolivian, and this enabled GM Jan Timman of the Netherlands to achieve the top result. His score was 8½-2½, mine was 10-3. When I saw the prize Jan won, I was not too unhappy. It was an unskillful abstract painting.

The USA beat out the Netherlands for 1st place, thereby gaining solid gold medals for the six players plus team captain Bill Goichberg. An Israeli businessman offered the Americans $2000 each for their medals, and all except Goichberg accepted the deal. Unfortunately Bill, who placed a higher personal value on the medal than his team members, had his stolen from his suitcase.

The medalists' totals: USA 37, Netherlands 36½, England 35½. The women's prizewinners were Israel 17, England 11½, Spain 11½. Out of the 48 men's teams, the BVI finished 47th.

As to the Libyan counter-Olympiad, none of the Communist nations participated. I don't know how many countries attended, but learning that El Salvador won the gold medal should give you an idea. I have a medallion from that event which actually reads 'The Against Chess Olympiad'. Perhaps something was lost in the translation.

Bill Goichberg was losing enthusiasm for his Silver Spring club. The roof leaked, and the landlord was not inclined to fix it, despite Bill's exhortations. Because of the moisture, tiny mushrooms were growing in the carpet. The other problem, unfortunately, was theft. Chess clocks and other equipment kept disappearing. It was disheartening. Rather than undertake unpleasant measures to deal with these problems, Bill just stopped paying the rent, apparently willing to let the club collapse by default. The result of this was predictable.

One weekend several members of the Plumbers chess team and others arrived at the club to find it shut, with the locks changed. We were aware of Bill's landlord difficulties, and realized that all of his chess equipment was undoubtedly still inside. There was a second door in a narrow hallway at the rear. We found that locked as well, but saw that the hallway ceiling panels apparently extended into the club. We lifted up the smallest man, found that the panels were easily removable, and operation retrieval was underway! Our man was able to wriggle through the narrow space, drop down onto the mushrooms on the other side, and unlock the door.

Though we had no preconceived plan, the chess plumbers worked much more smoothly than their namesake plumbers, the Watergate burglars. While one of us went out to rent a small truck, the others efficiently went about gathering up Goichberg's belongings, including chess equipment, tables, chairs, even two air conditioners that Bill had purchased. We were able to fit everything into the truck, and then took it all to my house, where we stored it in the garage and basement. We phoned Bill later to let him know what had happened, and he was appreciative of our efforts on his behalf.

We were quite light-hearted when our team named itself after burglars; who could have dreamed that fate would take us so seriously?

With the loss of the Maryland club the Plumbers had to seek other sites for their telephone matches. We found a satisfactory place in Virginia, but it was about twenty miles from my house. On one match night I was transporting a carload of players and kibitzers and we had to wait at a street corner for a ki-

bitzer who was literally running across town to catch a ride with us. He was late, and as a result we were late for the match, and the games were started without us, necessitating a couple of last-minute substitutions. As team captain I was responsible, and it wasn't too long after this that someone delicately suggested to me that Bob Eberlein would be a good team leader. What? Is this mutiny? Against Captain Hook!? The impertinence of the rascals!

Actually the transfer of leadership was entirely amicable, and Eberlein went on to do a fine job. Bob even arranged to have our matches played in the Vitro company offices, a restricted access place where he worked.

On one occasion, when Ulf Andersson was visiting Lubosh, we put the Swedish grandmaster on first board, but this prompted a later complaint from the opposing L.A. team. The telephone league lasted a few years and finally folded because of transmission difficulties and other problems.

Goichberg opened another club in Brooklyn, but once again it was petty theft that led to its failure. There were other attempts in New York to fill the void left by the demise of the flea house. Stu Morden's Game Room on Broadway and 74th Street was one of the better efforts, and lasted several years. Whether he was helped or hindered by his liquor license is unclear.

Charlie Hidalgo's Chess House was a small, homey place on 72nd Street that actually opened in 1966 before the flea house closed, and thrived for eleven years in its own way, but it was never in the same league as Fisher's. At one point Woody Allen decided to use the Chess House for a scene in a Zero Mostel film. Before the scene was actually shot, Charlie's partner decided to paint over the attractive art deco interior with white. A little later the film crew appeared and asked, 'What have you done to our set?' So Woody Allen had an unexpected production cost when he hired five set designers to recreate the warm colors that had been painted over.

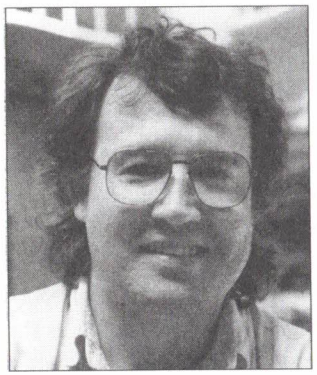
In 1977, through a wonderfully improbable coincidence, Mimi and I found ourselves in Bolivia at the same time for completely different reasons. First I was invited to play in the Pan-American tournament in the lowland city of Santa Cruz, and then via United Nations sponsorship Mimi was invited to teach a computer program to the Bolivian National Statistics Institute in the capital, La Paz. Unbelievable!

On the nearly empty plane from Miami, I was surprised to meet Arnold Denker, who was representing the US in the tournament. I started well by defeating Arnold, but then slipped down to my usual also-ran position. Three days into the tournament a missing player from a neighboring country appeared, bearded, disheveled, and exhausted. Failing to obtain a visa in

time, he had resorted to hiking, hitchhiking and rural buses! IM Herman van Riemsdijk of Brazil won the tournament. Through this tournament and numerous Olympiads we became friends, and he visited our home in Maryland twice.

With the tournament finished I went up (to 12,000 feet!) to join Mimi in La Paz where she still had a few days of teaching to do. La Paz is a colorful, fascinating city and I walked around vigorously exploring it despite being cautioned. As a result I was laid up for a day with sirroche, the altitude sickness. After Mimi finished her program, we took a boat across Lake Titicaca, a train across Peru to Cuzco, and then visited the amazing Incan ruins of Machu Picchu. It was a fabulous trip which we could not have afforded had it not been for the fortuitous coincidence which sent us to Bolivia simultaneously.

In 1977 a young master from nearby Virginia named Craig Vantilbury moved to St. Croix, in the US Virgin Islands. He was at loose ends, and went there at least partially because he knew of the great chess opportunities I had run into through my Virgin Islands connection. Craig has become quite active in international chess, playing in Olympiads, Zonals, and many tournaments in Cuba while representing the USVI. We had known each other in the States, but now because of our proximity in the islands as well as the States, meeting at foreign tournaments, and being hooked on blitz, we ended up becoming close friends.



Craig Vantilbury at the 1997 US Open

I met Craig again in Buenos Aires in 1978, his first Olympiad. The beautiful capital city was in a state of tension at that time; the government was unpopular, people were 'disappearing', and a purported bomb was found in a car

outside our hotel. Large buses took the players to the Olympiad site, with each bus being preceded by a motorcycle policeman who raised both arms from his vehicle to stop traffic as we went through intersections, and intoxicating tango music emanated from speakers. It was like a scene in a Fellini film.

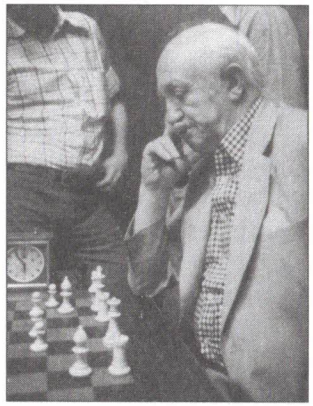
The games were played in the peripheral rooms of their huge soccer stadium, and staccato noises from a firing range across the street prevented us from nodding off at our boards.

In the women's Olympiad, the sight of three young sisters playing for their country made quite a stir. No, these were not the famous Polgar sisters playing for Hungary, they would not burst upon the chess world until the 1988 Olympiad. This country was India and the sisters were Vasanti, Jayshree and Rohini Khadilkar. Each of them had won the Indian Women's Championship at the age of 13. Few people are aware today that they had set this familial precedent.

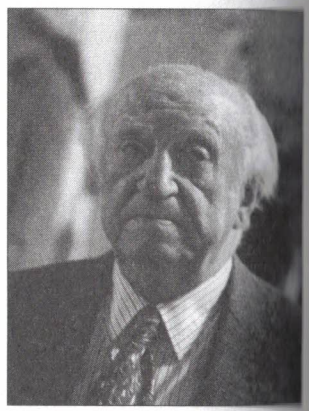
Buenos Aires is a cosmopolitan European-style city, but with its own cultural characteristics. I met Lubosh for dinner one night (he was playing for the US team) and we went to a restaurant that had been recommended. We sat down at 9:30 wondering if we were in the wrong place, since there were no other customers. Our food had already been served when a few diners trickled in, and then suddenly the place was filled. A waiter picked up an accordion, other instruments appeared, a boisterous song was begun, and a conga line formed with most all of the customers joining it, snaking their way around the tables with their hands on the hips of those in front of them, and singing loudly all the while. In almost no time the empty restaurant had been transformed into a wonderfully festive party.

I checked out the Argentinean art scene, showing slides of my paintings as I visited the galleries and museums. I received quite favorable reactions, even allowing for de rigeur courtesy, and someone said, 'you should really show your work to Senor ....', giving me his address. I found him in the center of a large complex of offices, where he seemed to be dealing with several projects simultaneously, giving directions to people who kept coming to his desk. Senor ... was clearly a major force in the Argentinean avant-garde. He looked at my slides thoughtfully, and invited me to attend a gallery opening that night, but my work was obviously not abstract enough to fit into his ambience. The exhibition opening was held in a beautifully designed gallery that was filled with the cultural elite of Buenos Aires. Of course this type of scene could be found in New York or Washington, but I never sought it out. The art world has so many factions and false trails that I intuitively felt one should find one's way alone. On the other hand I have always enjoyed the social aspects of chess.

One night I visited one of the major chess clubs of Buenos Aires, a centrally located comfortable suite of rooms, which had clearly been in use for many years. The famous Miguel Najdorf was playing five-minutes chess, and after kibitzing a while I moved across the room where it seemed possible to get a game. After a while Najdorf's opponent left, and Don Miguel, who was an insatiable blitz player, looked around the room for more action. Spotting me, he called out 'So, Hook, how do you play?' I foolishly replied 'Oh, usually one move at a time.' Someone snickered, but Najdorf obviously didn't care for my rude reply, and he said no more to me. I had lost an opportunity to play one of the great ones.



Miguel Najdorf, Buenos Aires 1978



and New York 1995

On a free day I took a launch and then a bus to visit nearby Montevideo, in Uruguay. En route we passed another bus similar to ours. It was a burnt ruin, with five black body bags awaiting removal. We are all deeply affected with such sudden stark encounters with our mortality, but would it be even more shocking to someone whose life is absorbed with a game in which the checkmated king immediately rises to fight another battle? A game in which death has no finality? I wonder.

These were years in which well-known grandmasters were trickling out of the Soviet Union by defection or legal emigration, and in this Olympiad there appeared a colorful imaginative GM named Roman Dzindzichashvili, who played strongly for Israel. He would later move to the US, where he resides today.

The big surprise here was the triumph of Hungary, which broke the string of Soviet victories since 1948. (Their winning team was Lajos Portisch, Ribli, Sax, Adorjan, Csom, and Vadasz.) The USSR won the silver

medal, and the USA, the bronze. Sixty-five countries sent teams to the men's Olympiad, and there were 32 women's teams, with the USSR winning the gold medal with 16 points. Hungary, West Germany and Yugoslavia tied at 11 points, and the tie break gave the silver and bronze to Hungary and West Germany. The BVI tied for next to last, and lost the tiebreak. I scored 9½-4½.

For some years we had been putting any available funds into the development of our Cooper Island home. After getting us started, Mimi's father had opted out, and later suggested we were not in a financial position to maintain an island home. He was probably right, but we loved Cooper Island and persevered, adding improvements to the house piecemeal. I sold paintings occasionally only to friends, and I had no contacts in the art world. My trips to tournaments and Olympiads were possible because transportation was the only expense, and this was an indulgence that Mimi understandingly tolerated.

Every two years Brazil organizes one of the art world's major events, the Sao Paulo Biennial, with many countries sending work by their best (or most fashionable) artists. The thought came to me, if I am representing the BVI in chess, why not art as well? It proved to be relatively simple to obtain permission from the BVI government for what was likely their first ever representation in this massive exhibition. So I rounded up a few of my best paintings at that time, and for convenience of shipping I removed the stretchers from my large paintings, rolled the work into cylinders, and sent the art and the stretchers off in a compact package. I learned later that they wanted all submitted paintings to arrive framed, and that they had found it most burdensome to restretch my canvases. Of course it would have been much more expensive for me to send large framed paintings. Perhaps the curators exacted their revenge for the extra work I caused them, because when the exhibition catalogue arrived the one painting of mine that was pictured was shown upside down despite the guiding arrows on the back! Of course the work that I submitted was quite abstract, and this sort of incident is what Philistines thrive on when they deride modern art.

I could not afford a trip to Brazil, but my Sao Paulo friend, Herman van Riemsdijk, went to see the exhibition and had nothing much to say about it. As with my previous one-man show, it was a pebble dropping into the ocean. My only regret was not waiting to enter the Biennial a few years later, when my work would be much stronger.

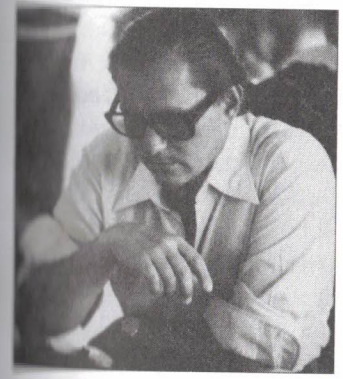
In 1980 I was invited to Cuba for their annual Capablanca tournament. Craig Vantilbury and I were to play in the second of three sections, just under the grandmaster group. Riding from the airport to Havana around 4 a.m., I saw many people walking to the city. They were going to participate in a massive

demonstration against those who were fleeing Cuba via the Mariel boatlift, which was then taking place. Craig and I left the hotel for only a brief look at the march, speaking our very basic Spanish, since we couldn't predict the crowd's reaction to Norte Americanos. Later I went to see a film with German GM Helmut Pfleger and during the newsreel, which showed a segment of a Castro speech, those in the packed theatre cheered enthusiastically. After watching the Cuban leader for a few moments, Helmut, speaking loudly in English, said, 'That man is an actor!' I cringed in my seat, hoping that no one near us understood English. Then the newsreel showed a crowd of would-be Cuban emigrants taking refuge in the Peruvian embassy grounds, which were so crowded that many went up into the trees. Noises of pigs and chickens were inserted into the soundtrack at that point, to help form a contemptible impression of the 'traitors'. It was a crude device, but the visual imagery was so powerful and the editing so smoothly done, that then and there I gained a new realization of the effectiveness of propaganda films. Afterward I told Cuban IM Juan Fernandez about it and he said that the director of that newsreel, named Alvarez, was very famous and had done many full-length films as well. Juan, who is a physicist as well as an IM, is a member of a talented patrician family who fully supports Castro's revolution. At intermittent intervals at tournaments over the years Juan and I have had some interesting dialogues about conditions in Cuba and the US.

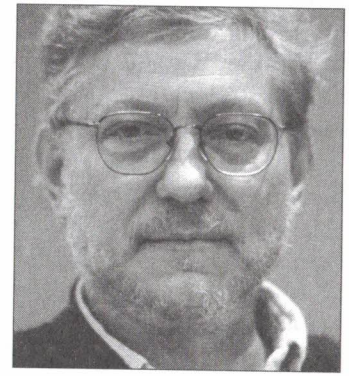
The Capablanca tournament took place in the southern city of Cienfuegos. We stayed in a comfortable hotel and played our games in a very high-ceilinged room in what appeared to be a municipal building of some sort. The tall windows were kept open and every twenty minutes or so revolutionary music wafted in from a statically troubled loud speaker in a park across the street. Birds appeared to be nesting near the ceiling of the tournament room and were constantly flying in and out. During my game with Vantilbury one bird dropped something on our board. Looking at the glob on the e4-square, Craig said 'at least he knew enough to centralize!'

One day Helmut Pfleger knocked at my door, accompanied by Soviet IM Igor Ivanov. Ivanov, blonde, spectacled, burly and well over 6 feet tall, was known principally for having defeated Anatoly Karpov. This was probably his first trip out of the Soviet Union and he spoke no English, so Helmut translated: 'Igor's return trip home will have a stopover in Gander, Canada. He is considering defecting there, and he wants to know what the prospects are for a professional chess player in the United States.' I gave as realistic an appraisal as possible, and then as more information was exchanged I got an idea, based on the facts that Igor would stay on in Cuba for a second tournament while I would return to the States as soon as the Capablanca tournament was over. I had a camera, and proposed to take Ivanov's photo, go to the Canadian em-

bassy in Washington to tell them of the defection scheme, and give them the photo to help the Canadian police identify Igor at the Gander airport. I did my part, but things almost didn't work out as planned. Igor enjoys a drink or two, and he talked too much in a Cuban bar, where he was overheard. As a result his flight ticketing was rerouted to go through Dakar, Senegal, instead of Gander. When Ivanov learned of this the resourceful chess player simply went to a travel office and had the original routing reinstated. And no one thought to check! The Canadian police were indeed waiting for Igor at Gander, and the defection went smoothly. Ivanov lived for a few years in Canada and played in two Olympiads for that country before immigrating into the US. We used to exchange knowing smiles when we met. Igor passed away in 2005.



Igor Ivanov, Cuba 1980
This photo facilitated Igor's defection



and at the World Open, 1997

While still in Cuba I had the opportunity to visit the large Havana cemetery, where I found Capablanca's grave. The Cuban hero's tomb had been indistinguishable from the others near it, but after some years a 4-foot high stone chess king was added, in belated recognition of his exploits.

I also visited Ernest Hemingway's home, which now functions as a museum, with the writer's library still on the bookshelves, just as he had left it. Of particular interest was the tall 10-foot-square tower he had built next to his house, where he wrote in complete privacy.

The Cubans that I met held surprisingly friendly feelings toward the US, considering the privations they had been subjected to by the American embargo. But baseball diamonds were all over the place, and our mutual love of the game went a long way toward overcoming the government's hostile propaganda. Also, those in the western provinces could tune into Florida's television programs.

From New York came the word that Arnold Proujansky had dropped dead on the street. The heavy man with the scathing wit had been one of the major personages from the now defunct flea house. He was embittered with his club-footed lot in life, and in later years his clothing became threadbare, but he found some compensation in his brilliant domination of our intellectual group.

The 1980 Olympiad was held in Malta, a Mediterranean island which was intensively bombed in World War II. There are ancient ruins, a cathedral with the renowned Maltese knights buried beneath their colorful emblems, and barely green hillsides with small stone huts to shelter shepherds from the strong winds. The games were played in a very long stone walled room, which formerly functioned as a hospital. Our team stayed in a large apartment, and the only single-occupancy room was quickly commandeered by Elton Georges, by virtue of his rank as Deputy Governor of the BVI. Another noteworthy member of our team was 12-year-old John Jarecki, accompanied by his mother, Carol. (The Jarecki family owns an entire island in the BVI.) Carol later became further involved in chess as an arbiter, with increasing recognition of her skills to the point where she has officiated at Olympiads and World Championships. Young John's chess talent had already attracted attention, and now NBC sent a television crew from London to cover him, with the Olympiad being only incidental to their story.

This was Garry Kasparov's first Olympiad, and at a low board the future World Champion was able to rack up a fine score for the Soviets.

I played first board as usual, and had a good start by defeating Finnish GM Heikki Westerinen. In the second round I barely hung on for a draw against a Tunisian IM when the position was repeated three times. After that our team dropped down to lesser opposition, and I was able to continue scoring well. In the final round three players were still in the running for the 1st board gold medal. Philippine GM Eugenio Torre and I had the same score, but he had faced far stronger opponents, so if we remained tied he would deservedly win the medal. The third player vying for the gold was Saifudin Kanani of Kenya, and as we were paired together we both had a chance to dispose of one rival and hope that Torre faltered. With white I played the Trompovsky opening, broke up Kanani's position with a pawn advance, and held on for the win. As my teammates were congratulating me, Helmut Pfleger came up and I asked him if he knew the result of the Torre game. When he told us that Torre had only managed to draw against Westerinen we let out a big whoop. I explained to Helmut that this meant that I had won the gold medal, and he smiled and replied, 'Well, then I brought you *really* good news!' My score was 11½ out of 14 games. Out of 81 men's teams the BVI finished 75th.

Heikki Westerinen – Bill Hook

1.e4 g6 2.d4 d6 3.♗g5 ♗g7 4.c3 ♘d7 5.♘d2 c5 6.d5 ♖b8 7.a4 ♘gf6 8.f4 0-0 9.♗c4 ♖e8 10.♘gf3 h6 11.♗h4 ♘h5 12.g3 ♘b6 13.♗b3 ♗h3 14.♕e2 ♕c7 15.a5 ♘a8 16.♘c4 b5 17.axb6 axb6 18.♘a3 b5 19.♘xb5 ♕b6 20.♗c4 ♗d7 21.♘a7 ♕xb2 22.♕xb2 ♖xb2 23.0-0 ♘b6 24.♗d3 ♗xc3 25.♖fc1 ♗b4 26.♘c6 f6 27.e5 ♔g7 28.♖a7 dxe5 29.♘fxe5 fxe5 30.♘xe5 c4 31.♖xd7 ♘xd7 32.♗xg6 ♘xe5 33.♗xh5 ♘g6 34.f5 ♘xh4 35.gxh4 ♖a8 0-1

Bill Hook – Saifudin Kanani

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗g5 c5 3.d5 ♕b6 4.♘c3 d6 5.e4 ♘bd7 6.♖b1 a6 7.a4 h6 8.♗e3 ♕b4 9.f3 ♘e5 10.♗d2 ♕b6 11.f4 ♘g6 12.♗d3 ♗g4 13.♕c1 ♗d7 14.e5 dxe5 15.♗xg6 fxg6 16.fxe5 0-0-0 17.exf6 exf6 18.♘ge2 ♗g4 19.♗e3 ♗xe2 20.♔xe2 ♕b4 21.♖e1 ♗d6 22.h3 g5 23.♔f1 g4 24.hxg4 h5 25.g5 h4 26.♗f2 h3 27.gxh3 ♖xh3 28.♖e4 ♕a5 29.♕d1 f5 30.♖h4 ♖xh4 31.♗xh4 ♕b4 32.♗f2 ♕f4 33.♕h5 g6 34.♕h4 ♕d2 35.♖e1 ♗f4 36.♖d1 ♗xg5 37.♖xd2 ♗xh4 1-0

The Soviets got back to their usual winning ways, but just barely, taking the team gold medal on a tiebreak with Hungary (silver) and Yugoslavia took the bronze. In the women's competition, the USSR squeaked through for the gold again, beating out Hungary by just a half point, while Poland won the bronze.

When I was called up to the stage to receive my medal, I had intended to take the microphone and suggest that in future Olympiads there should be two individual gold medals, one for performance rating as well as the usual prize for highest percentage score. (Performance ratings take into account the strength of one's opponents, and are a far more accurate measure of one's play. Gaining the highest percentage on the other hand can be achieved by a middling player, such as myself, taking advantage of weaker opposition.) It was a reasonable suggestion to make, but I was overcome by emotion and failed to carry it through. It was my 6th Olympiad and most of those in attendance knew me, so there was sustained applause, and that contributed to the fuzzing of my brain.

Surprisingly, there was more to come. A year or two later the BVI (with approval from London) published an issue of four stamps commemorating my winning of the gold medal! One of the stamps depicted the medal itself, and another showed the position in my last round game against Kanani just after the winning move was made.

Four BVI chess stamps, one of which features a position from the Hook-Kanani game

In 1982, en route to the Lucerne Olympiad, my plane landed in Munich, where I briefly visited Mr. Lubosh (Lubosh Kavalek's father). A Czech exile, he was active in Radio Free Europe broadcasts to his homeland. Then somehow I caught a ride to the Olympiad in GM Helmut Pfleger's Mercedes, along with Chilean IM Victor Frias. Lucerne was beautiful, reminiscent of my first Olympiad in Lugano with its lake surrounded by dramatic mountains.

Most of the teams were scattered about in comfortable small hotels, while the major chess powers were assigned to higher-grade quarters, as usual. It was a FIDE election year, and candidate Florencio Campomanes was putting on a high-powered drive to win the presidency. His campaign headquarters was in a huge suite of the best hotel, and there he hosted rotating groups of countries, soliciting their votes with the aid of hors d'oeuvres and a generous bar. Campo's tactics reminded me of elections in the United States, energetic rather than subtle. I still have one of his expensive campaign posters, featuring a dynamic photo of the candidate. Of course, Campo won.

Apropos of posters, I had been collecting them since my first Olympiad in 1968, and on the last day in Lucerne, Larry Evans' wife Ingrid acted as lookout while I snitched a particularly attractive Middle Eastern poster off the wall. There are now over 100 in my collection, but petty larceny was not the usual means of accession.

Igor Ivanov was on first board for the Canadian team, for his first ever Olympiad after defecting from the Soviets in 1980. He would play once again for Canada two years hence, before going to live in the USA. After the day's games were finished, Igor became known for his partying proclivities and (surprisingly) a fine singing voice.

Carol Jarecki was functioning as an arbiter as well as being the BVI delegate to the FIDE meetings. She demonstrated her versatility on another occasion, when her rented car had a flat tire. She fixed it in jig time, while four able-bodied BVI team members watched.

A very considerate gift for the players in Lucerne was the free use of a fine city fitness center. Many of the Olympians took advantage of the facilities, and I played squash with Diane Savereide of the US women's team. The Americans were surprised when men occasionally entered the women's locker room, and vice versa. In this small matter the Europeans had more relaxed customs than the West, but the Swiss were often quick to complain about the rigidity of their society.

The final results for the men's teams: USSR 42½-13½, Czechoslovakia 36, USA 35½. The BVI finished 84th out of 92 teams. I scored 10½-3½, which was 4th overall. The women's section had 45 teams, with the USSR scoring 33-9, Romania 30, and Hungary 26.

Since the demise of Bill Goichberg's club and our dramatic rescue of his equipment, there were few opportunities for speed chess in the Washington area. When the weather was good one could pick up a game at the outdoor tables in Dupont Circle, or while visiting someone's home a few games might be played after dinner, but that was about it. So, being the blitzophile that I confess to be, I started having occasional speed tournaments in our home. We still had a number of Goichberg's tables and chairs, and I would clear away my painting equipment in the basement to make room for each tourney. A ping-pong table (purchased from a former US table-tennis champion) was also available.

I called up the strongest players in the Washington area and the response was very good; they came when they could and it was obvious everyone had a great time. Among the locals who came were GMs Lubosh Kavalek and Alex Sherzer, ex-World Junior Champion Mark Diesen, IMs Larry Kaufman, Richard DeLaune, Steve Odendahl, Eugene and John Meyer, and masters Greg Acholonu, Larry Gilden, Macon Shibut, Robin Spital, Fred Turim, Bob Eberlein and Walter Morris. Also, by the time I had participated in several Olympiads, players whom I befriended at these events would occasionally come to Washington, sometimes staying at our house, and I would draft them for our tourneys. These visits by foreign players were festive chess events, enjoyed by all of us. Aside from the games, getting to know the visitors on a personal level was very interesting.

Among the foreign visitors who came to our home, some were brought over by Lubosh Kavalek. During the eighties and early nineties Lubosh was an ac-

tive player on the grandmaster circuit, and was also executive director of the Grandmasters' Association, and a coach of World Championship Candidates. He traveled in rather exalted chess circles, and knowing me for the groupie that I am, he very kindly brought some of his guests to our house. Among these were Swedish GMs Ulf Andersson, Czechs Lubomir Ftacnik and Jan Smejkal, German Robert Hübner, former World Champion Boris Spassky, Englishman Nigel Short, and Netherlanders Jan Timman and IM Hans Böhm. The latter two played in a 5-minute tournament in a large field that included Lubosh and former World Junior Champion Mark Diesen, and Timman came out three points ahead. On another occasion I had a plus score against Robert Hübner(!), but I'm forced to admit that these games were on the ping-pong table. He demolished me in four chess games, of course. When the Czechs came I was able to give Jan Smejkal a photo I took of him at the 1968 Olympiad, many years previously!

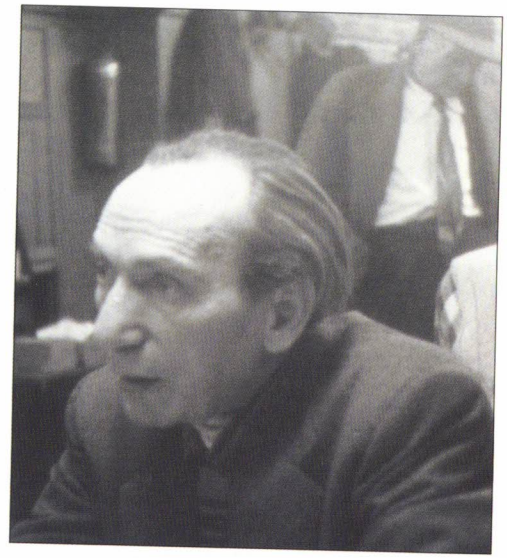
Others who came to our home in Maryland were Brazilians GM Jaime Sunye Neto, IM Herman van Riemsdijk, Rubens Filguth and Christian Toth, Colombian IMs Carlos Cuartas and Oscar Castro, Mexican GM Marcel Sisniega, Canadian GM Peter Biyiasis, Romanians GM Florin Gheorghiu and Olympian Elisabeth Polihroniade, English IM David Goodman, Olympian board prize winner Farooqi of Pakistan, World Correspondence Champion Hans Berliner, IM Igor Ivanov, GMs Roman Dzindzichashvili and Robert Byrne and GM Boris Gulko and his wife Anna Aksharumova. (Boris read quietly upstairs while Anna played in our tournament.)

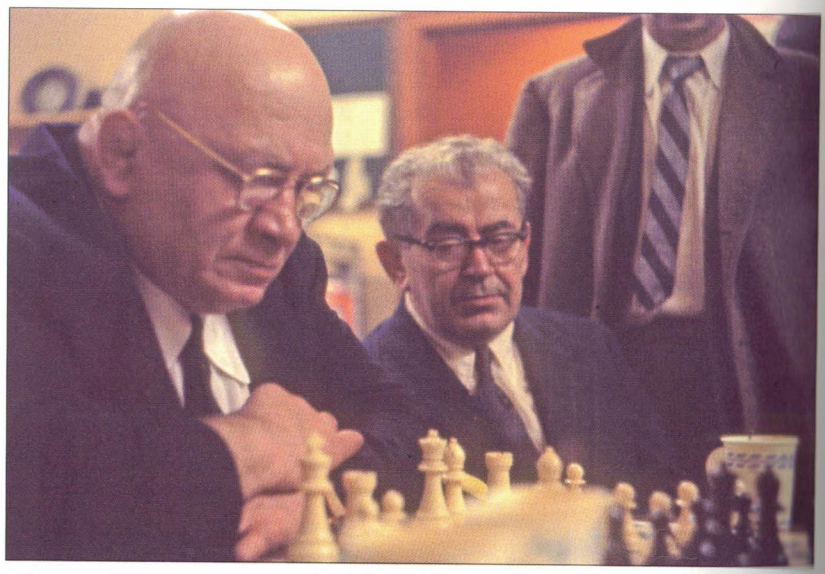
Considering that my master's rating is barely visible, I feel fortunate in having been able to entertain so many of the world's chess VIP's. I'm not just hooked on the game itself, but on the social aspects as well.

Before leaving the subject of my blitz tournaments, two of the events in particular must be mentioned. Given that we live in the Washington DC area, it follows that a number of the local players are government workers, and on the first night in question there came a CIA man, as well as someone from the National Security Agency. By coincidence, I had chosen this time to invite Yuri Barsukov, a Soviet national who had lived for many years in Washington as a reporter for the Russian newspaper 'Izvestia'. Yuri had played in many local tournaments, and had an expert's rating, so he merited my invitation. Barsukov prided himself on being the first Soviet reporter ever to ask a question of a US president at a news conference. (The president was John F. Kennedy.) Between games Yuri was quite genial, although he wasn't averse to making politically tinged remarks. When I mentioned the recent defection of IM Igor Ivanov (no one yet knew of my involvement with that) Barsukov pooh-poohed the event, saying that Ivanov 'wasn't that important.'

Benny Fine playing 'Tiger' at Fisher's on 42nd Street, New York.

George Treysman at Fisher's: the supreme coffee house player.



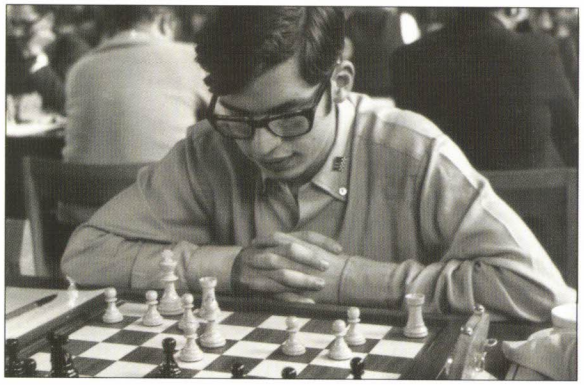


Kak-Kak the wrestler-chess player. The gentle giant featured in Stanley Kubrick's film 'The Killing' and died after he was stabbed by a hooligan while entering the club.

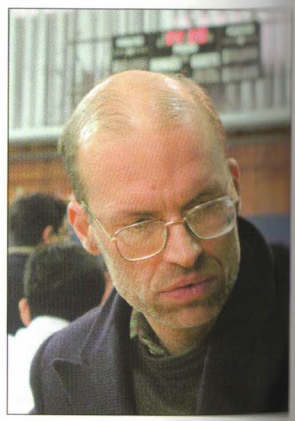
Rivkin (front), 'the matchmaker' who would die during a big-money game he had set up himself at Fisher's. Behind him the old European music lover Ziggy Baumblatt.

Swedish grandmaster Ulf Andersson in 1970 at the Siegen Olympiad.

Efim Geller, one of the greatest players in the world during the 1950's and 1960's, at the Malta Olympiad in 1980.

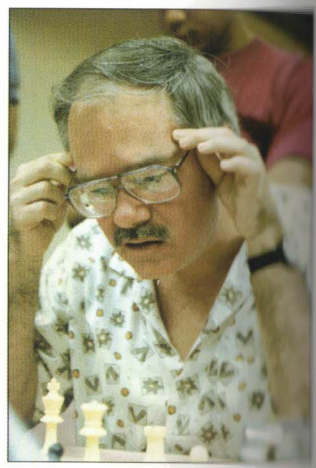


The legendary Brazilian grandmaster Henrique Mecking in Lugano in 1968.

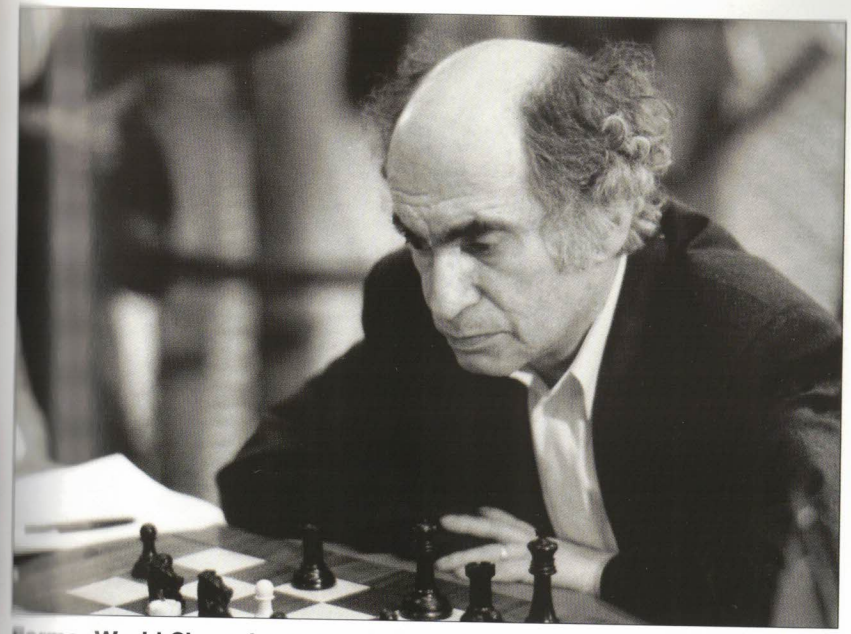


Mecking in 2002 at the Bled Olympiad.

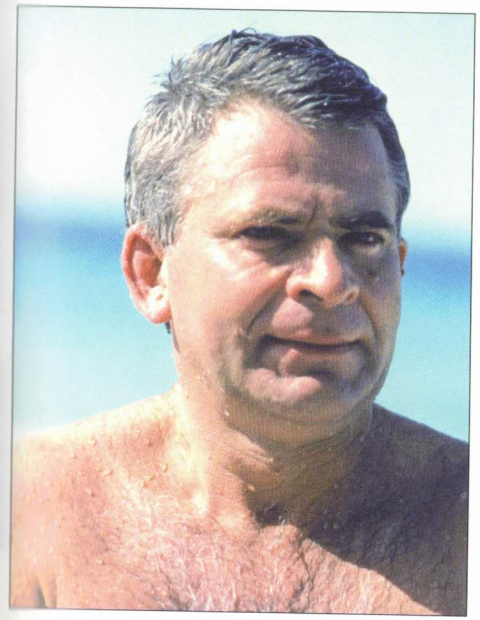
Walter Browne, playing for Australia in 1970 in Siegen, frequented the Flea House for years: intensive, impulsive, combative, yet always fair.



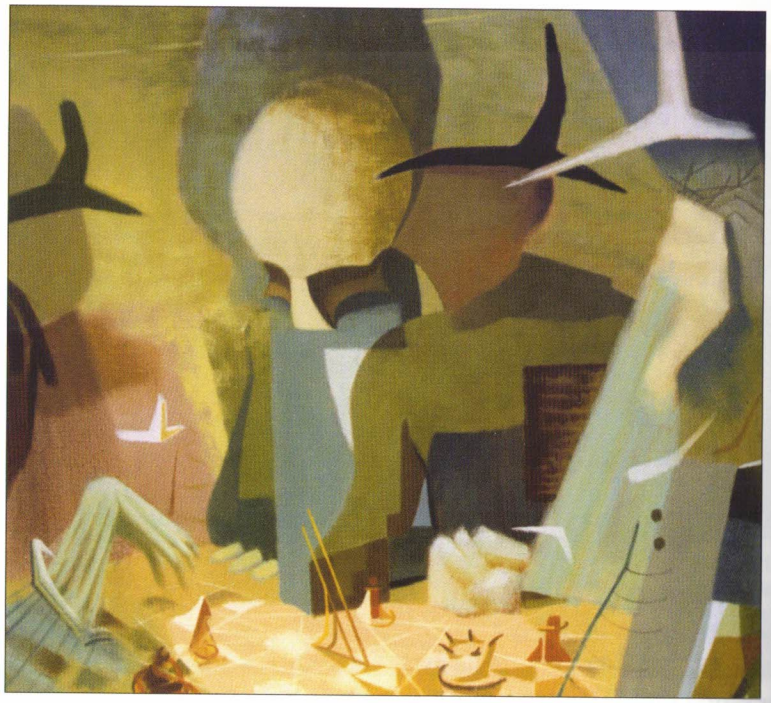
Browne in 1996 at the National Open in Las Vegas.



Former World Champion Mikhail Tal at the New York Open in the late 1980's.

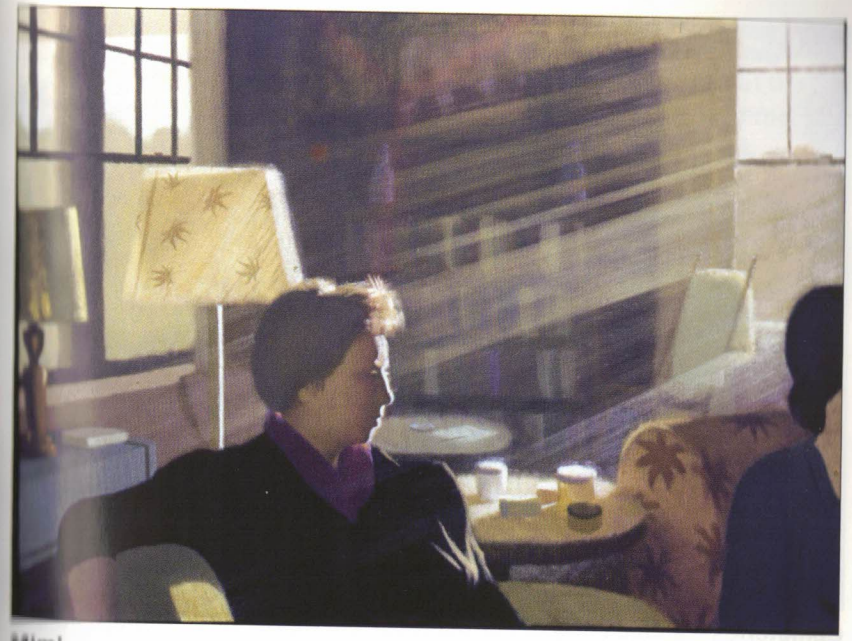


Former World Champion Boris Spassky after a refreshing swim at the Dubai Olympiad in 1986.

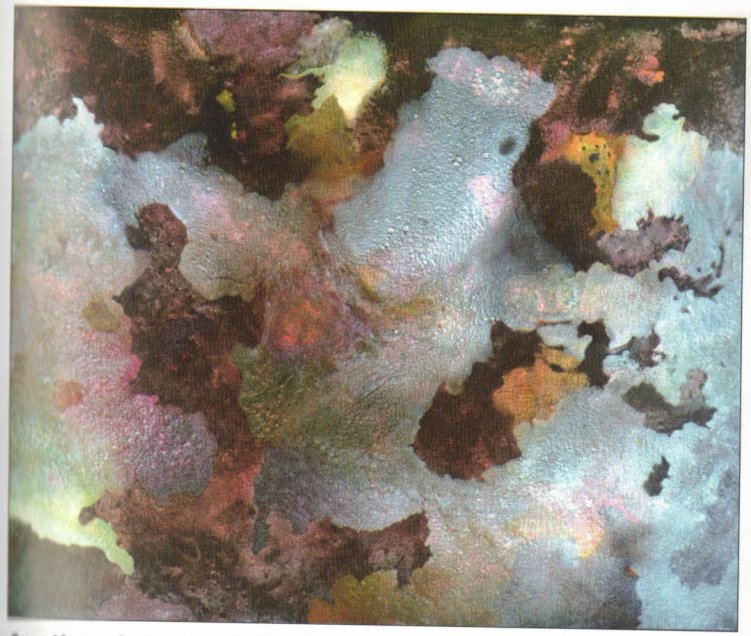


An abstract chess painting by the author.

Pal Benko (right), the King of the Swiss tournaments. The current location of the painting is unknown.



Mimi.



Another abstract painting by the author.

Cemeteries – a much neglected attraction for tourists – but sometimes dangerous...

Cemetery statuary can make for intriguing photographs.

Ljubojevic playing Timman at the 1982 Lucerne Olympiad.

At the 1986 Olympiad in Dubai: Bryon Nikoloff versus Orestes Rodriguez.

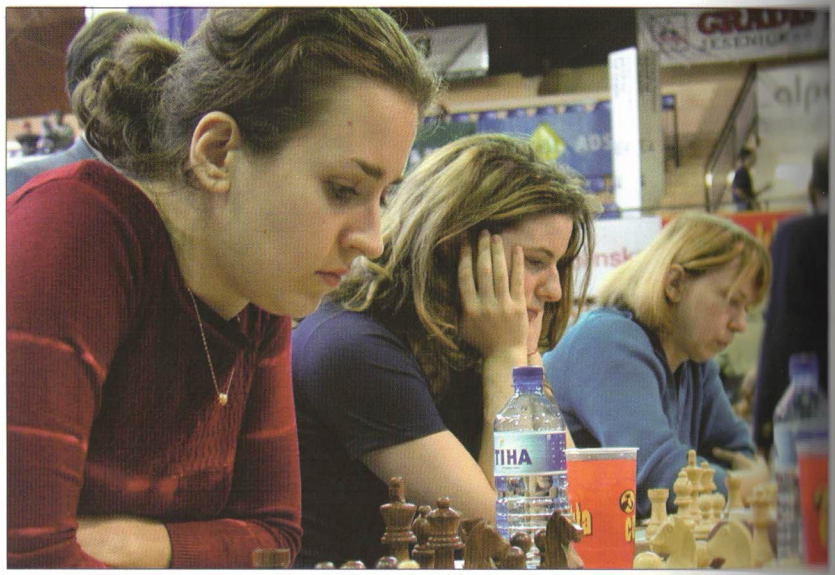
Alexey Shirov playing Kiril Georgiev at the 1992 Manila Olympiad.

Judit Polgar and Lajos Portisch representing Hungary at the 1994 Moscow Olympiad.

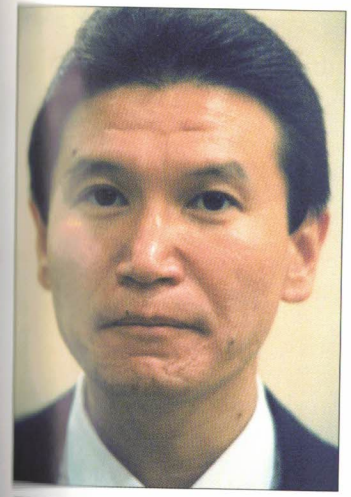
xander Grischuk (left) sporting a spectacular hairdo for Russia at the Bled mpiad, 2002. His opponent is Ljubomir Ljubojevic.

of the women's teams from the Arabic countries at the Bled Olympiad.

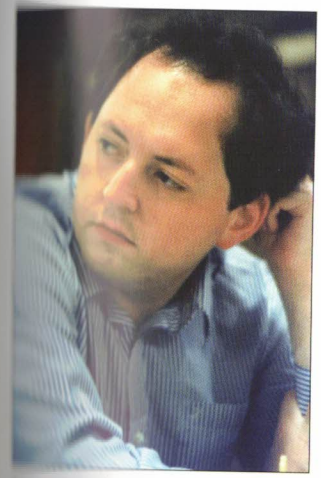
Playing for the USA team at Bled: Gregory Kaidanov (left) and Yasser Seirawan.



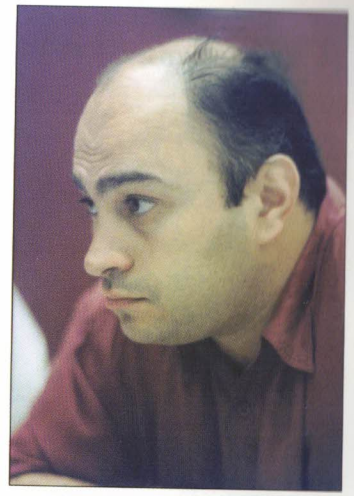
The USA women's team at Bled, left to right: Irina Krush, Jennifer Shahade and Elena Akhmilovskaya.



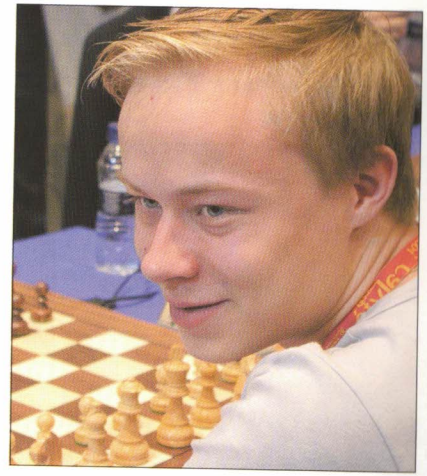
FIDE President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov.



Israelian GM Ilya Smirin, who was forcibly removed from the 1994 Moscow Olympiad when he failed to produce his ID-card.

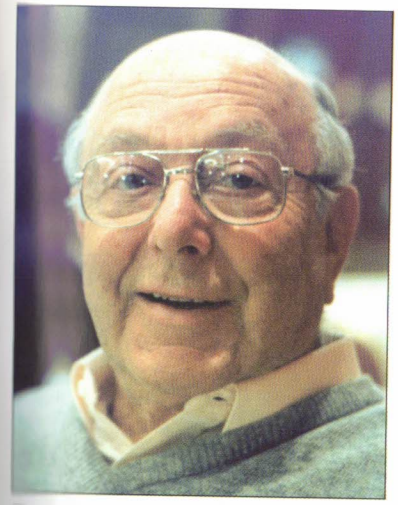


Former European Champion and FIDE vice president Zurab Azmaiparashvili, the subject of a nasty incident at the 2004 Olympiad in Calvia.

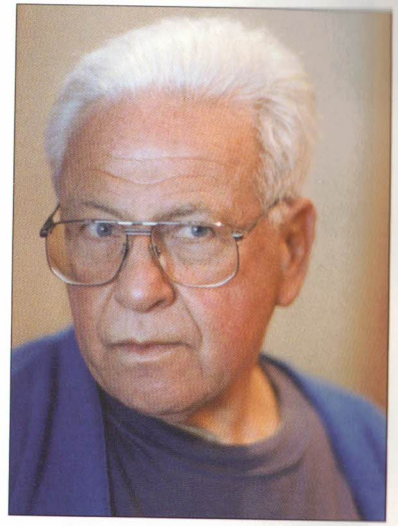


Finnish grandmaster Tomi Nybäck.

The late Tony Miles, an ultra-creative grandmaster.



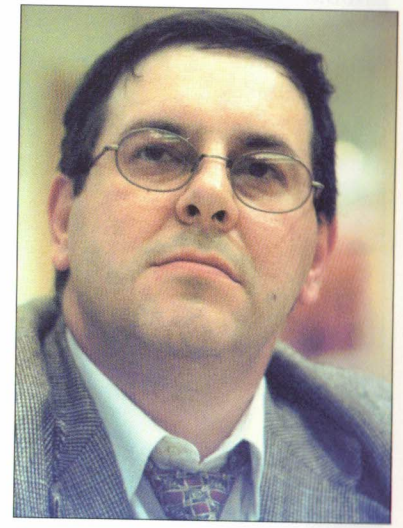
Former US Champion Arnold Denker – a chance meeting at a tournament in Bolivia.



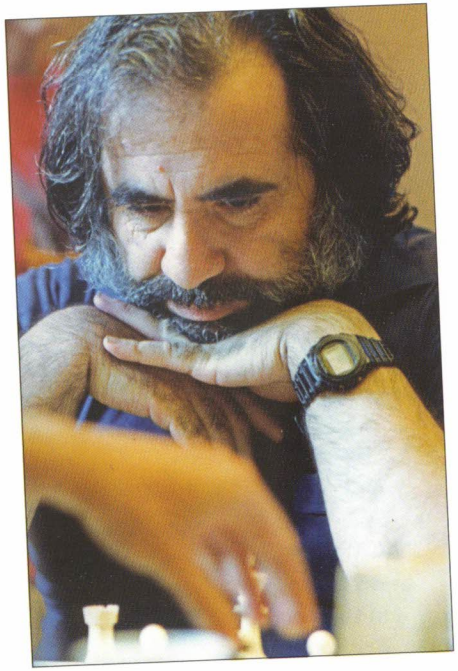
Arthur Bisguier, another former US Champion, who participated in the first open Swiss on the British Virgin Islands, in 1988.

Indian grandmaster Abhijit Kunte, who became a friend of the author's after they had played a game at the World Open in Philadelphia.

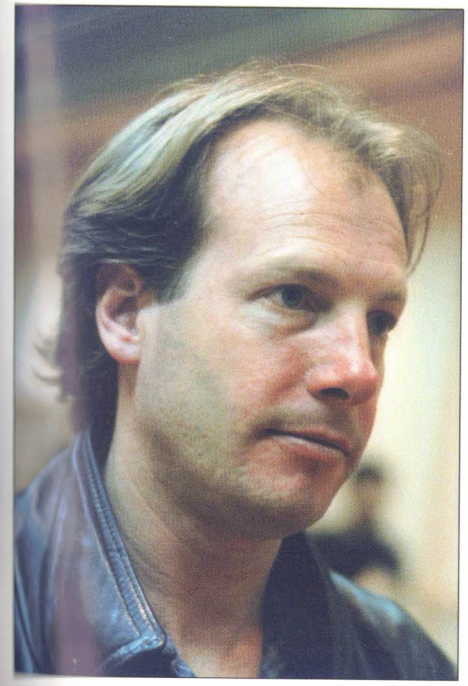
Alex Wojtkiewicz, the Polish-born US grandmaster who died prematurely in 2006.



Alex Yermolinsky, winner of the US Open in 1999.

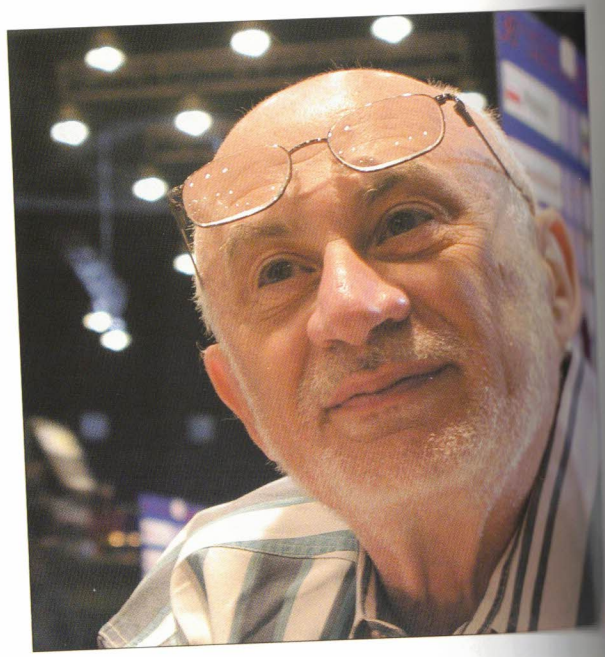


The colorful, imaginative Soviet emigrant Roman Dzindzichashvili.

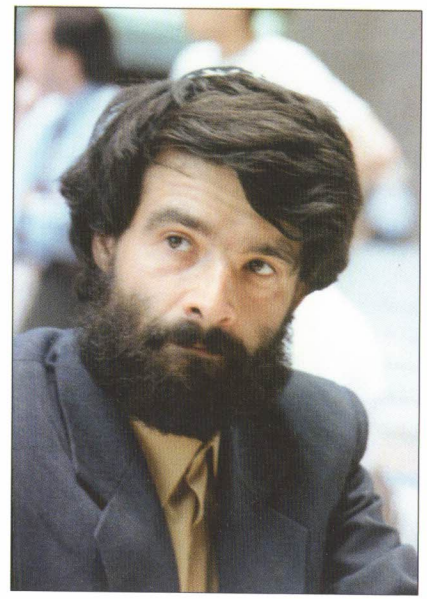


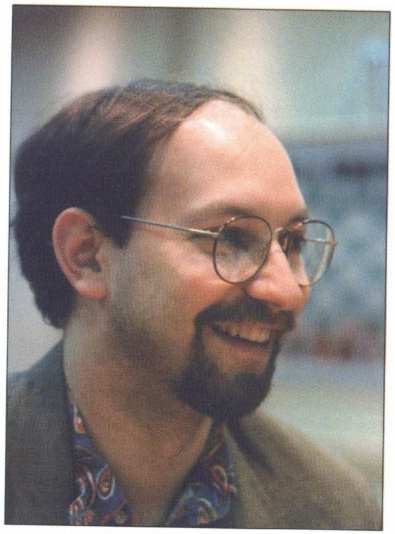
US grandmaster Nick de Firmian.

Reading upstairs while his wife Anna was blitzing at the author's house: Boris Gulko.

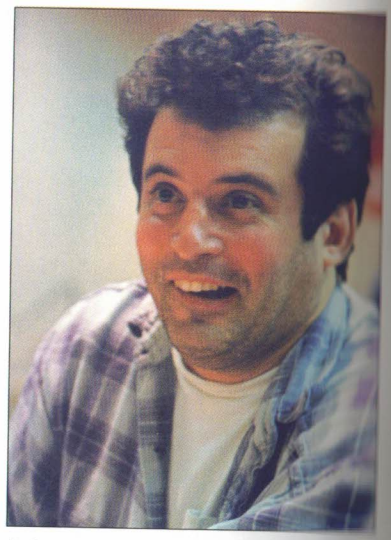


Former World Championship Candidate Leonid Yudasin.

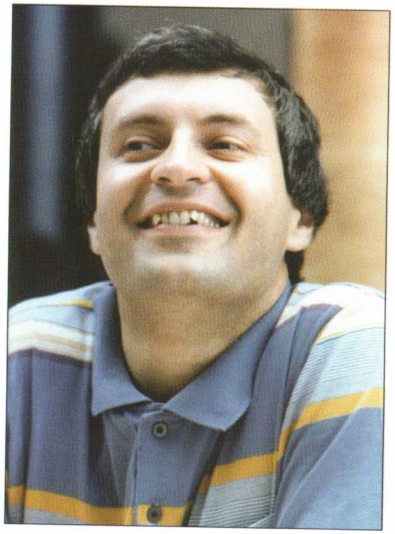




Joel Benjamin.

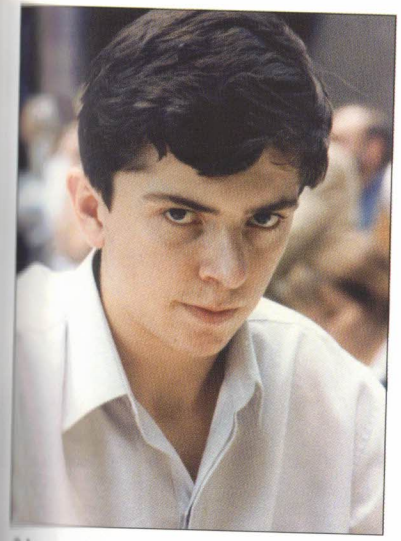


John 'the Fed' Fedorowicz.

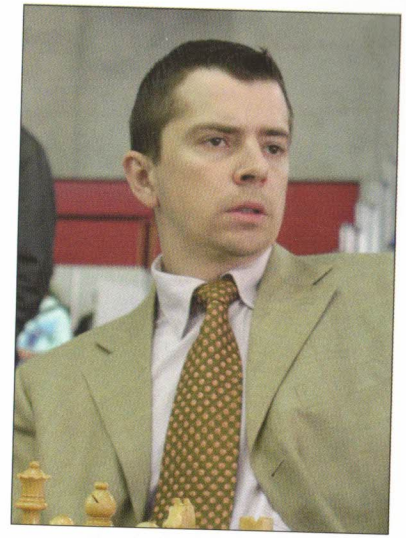


Alexander Chernin.

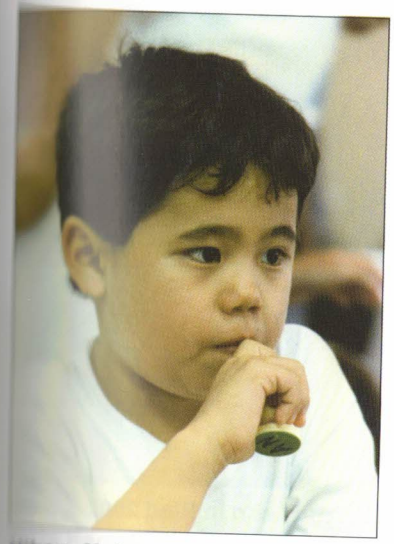
Gregory Kaidanov.



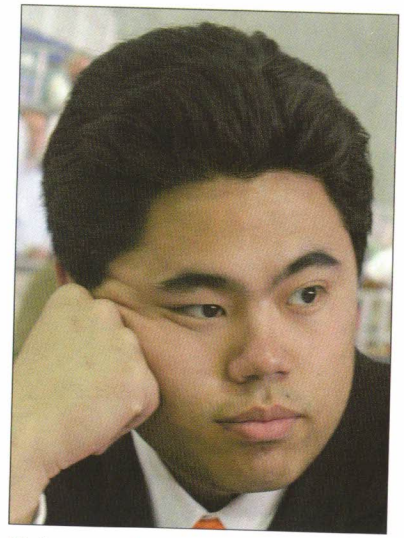
Alexander Onischuk in 1994.



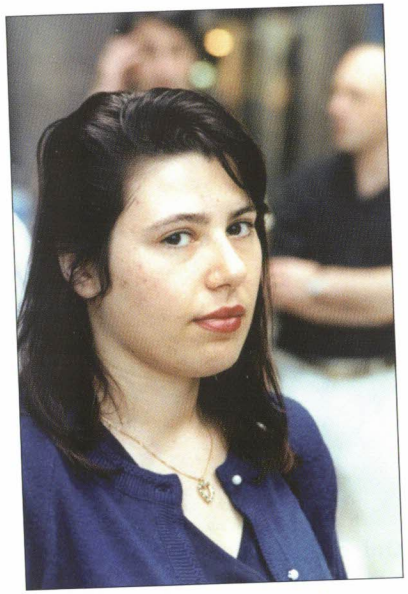
Onischuk in 2006, when he became US Champion for the first time.



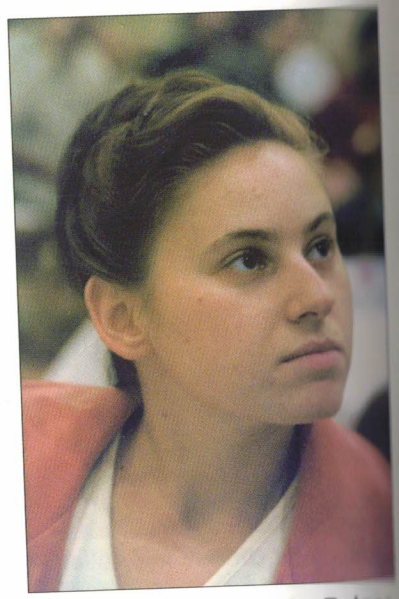
Hikaru Nakamura in 1996: the future of US chess?



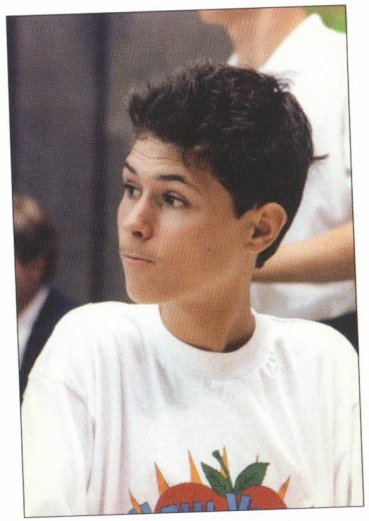
Nakamura in 2006.



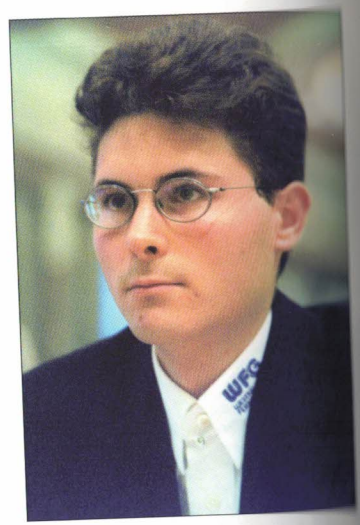
US-based Susan Polgar, the eldest of the talented Polgar sisters.



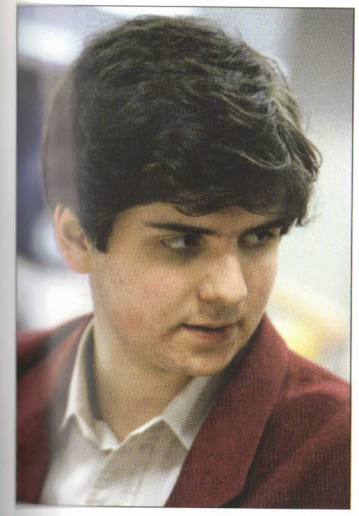
Judit, the youngest of the Polgar prodigies.



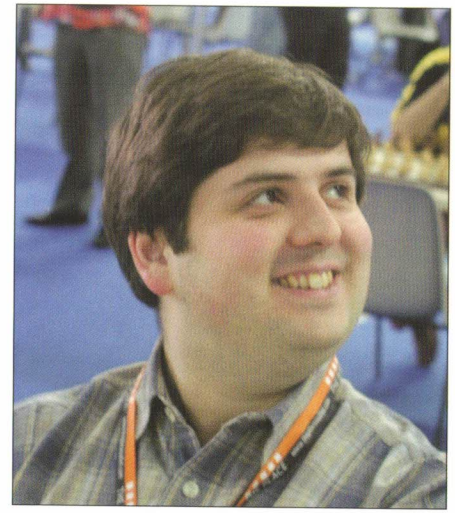
Another young Hungarian top talent: Peter Leko in 1994.



And Leko in Bled 2002.

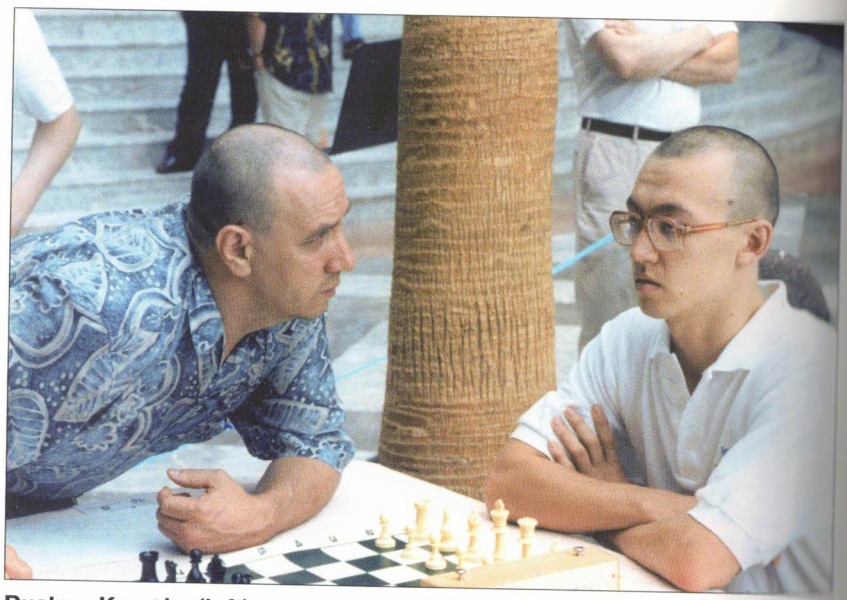


A young Peter Svidler, 1995.

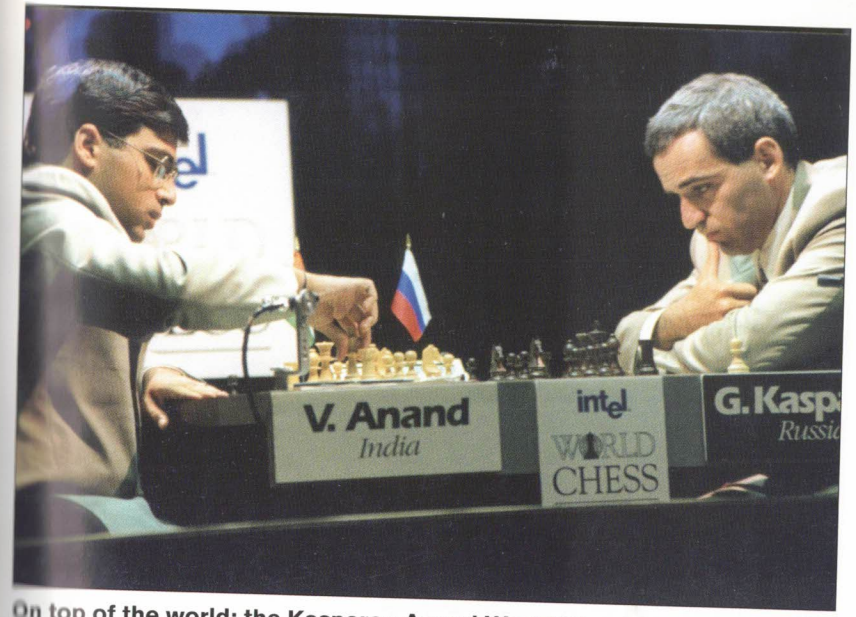


Svidler at the Turin Olympiad, 2006.

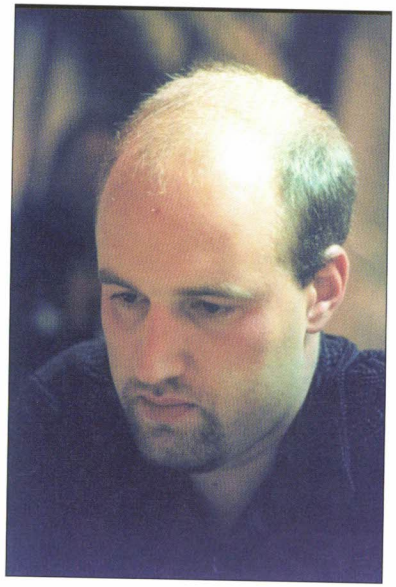
Nata Kamsky (left) playing Vladimir Kramnik, PCA Candidates' Match, New York 1994.



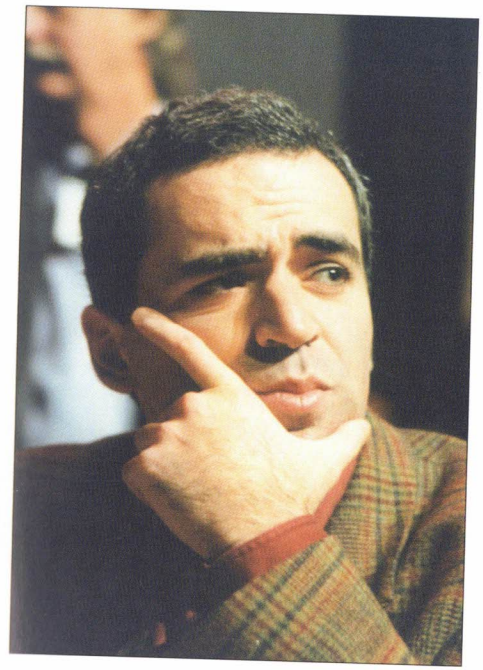
Rustam Kamsky (left) used to protect the rights of his son Gata (right) aggressively.



On top of the world: the Kasparov-Anand World Championship match at the World Trade Center in New York, 1995.

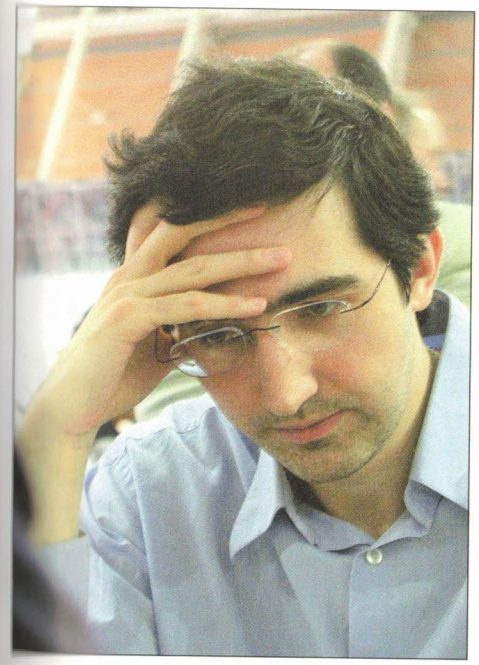


Alexander Shabalov, the amiable analyst who left the Kamsky-Salov Candidates' match (1994) prematurely with a bruised face.



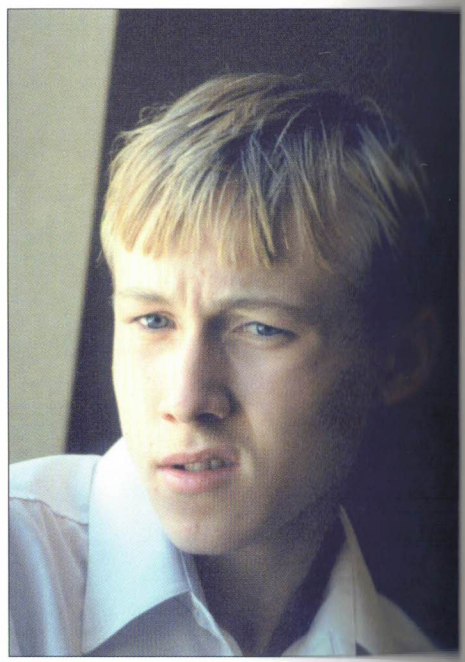
A mover and a shaker: Garry Kasparov.

Alexander Khalifman, who became FIDE World Champion in 1999.

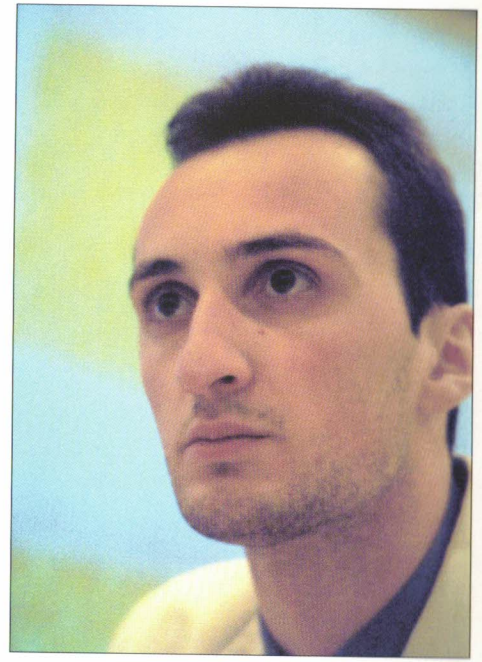


Vladimir Kramnik, who defeated Kasparov to become World Champion in 2000.

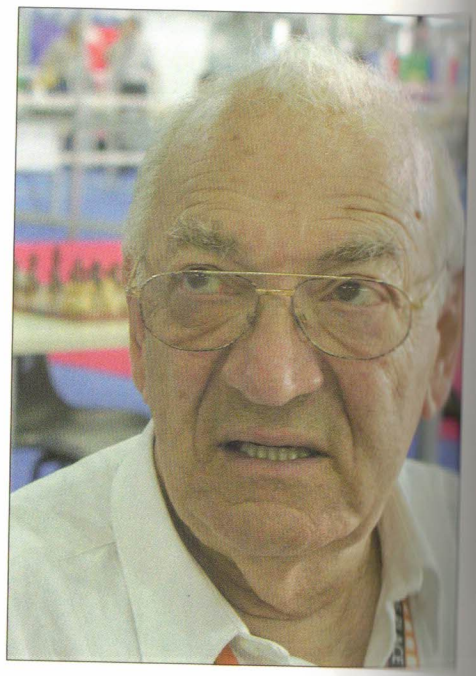
Ruslan Ponomariov, FIDE World Champion 2002-2004.



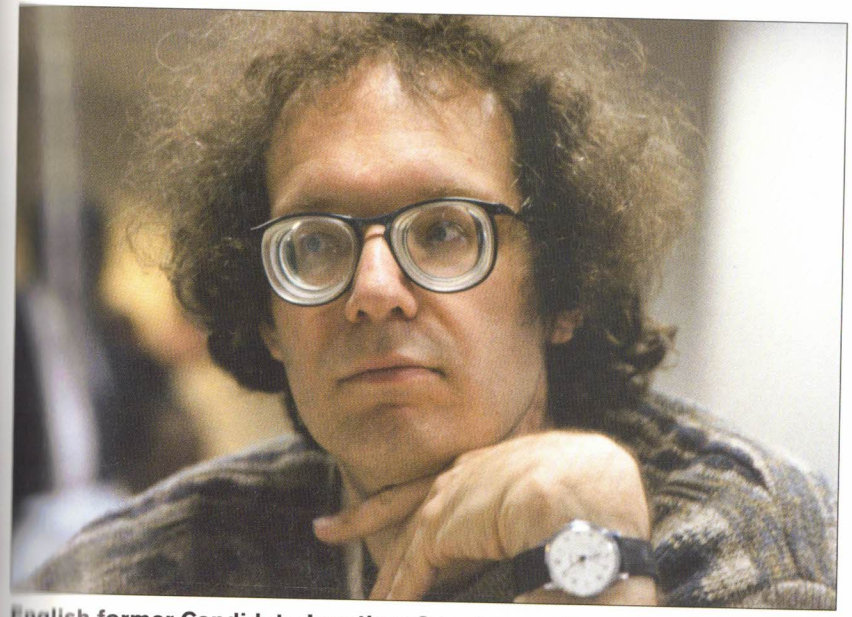
Veselin Topalov, FIDE World Champion 2005-2006.



Former World Championship Challenger Viktor Kortchnoi.

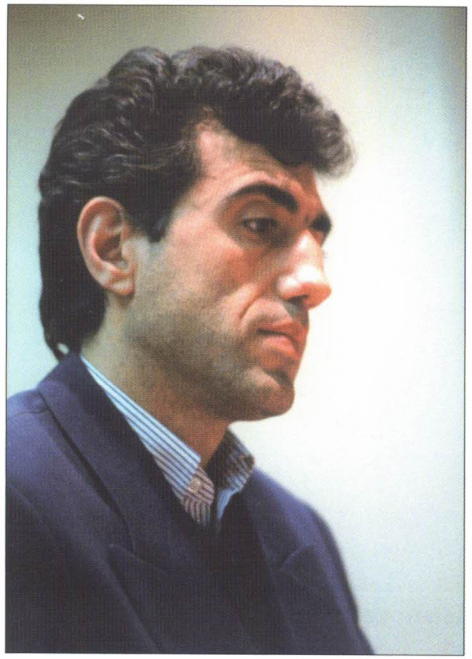


Israelian former Candidate Boris Gelfand.



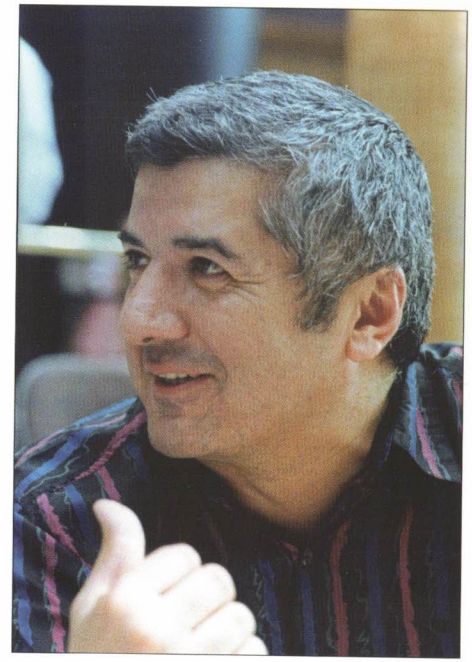
English former Candidate Jonathan Speelman, who once called the author 'the father of the Olympiad'.

The flamboyant Serbian grandmaster Ljubomir Ljubojevic.

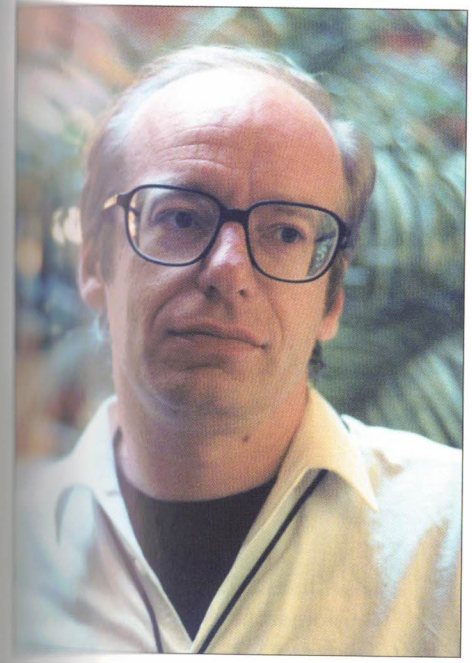


Armenian grandmaster Smbat Lputian, the supreme champion of all stone faces.

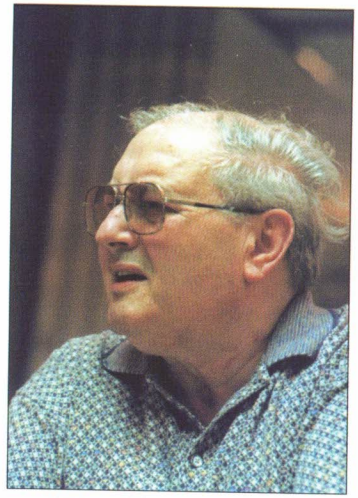
Armenian grandmaster Rafael Vaganian.



English GM Julian Hodgson, whose wife Lisette was captain of the Virgin Islands team at the 1992 Olympiad in Manila.

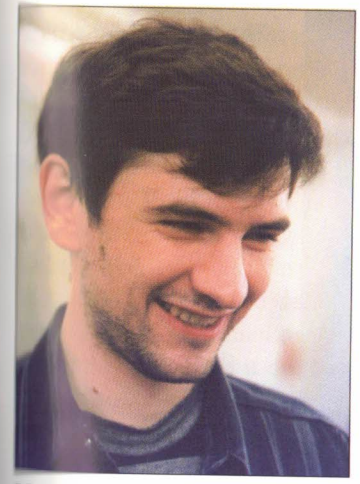


Former Candidate Robert Hübner from Germany.



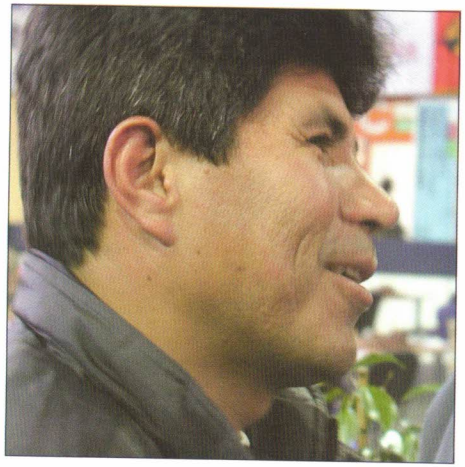
The late Eduard Gufeld, known for his loud disputes.

The inventive Ukraine grandmaster Oleg Romanishin.



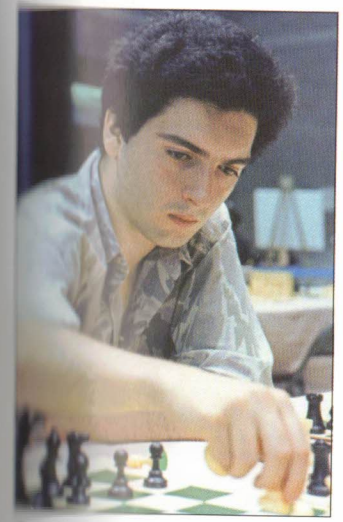
Moldovan grandmaster Victor Bologan.

Armenia's latest hope Levon Aronian.



Peruvian grandmaster Julio Granda Zuniga.

Grandmaster Kiril Georgiev from Bulgaria.

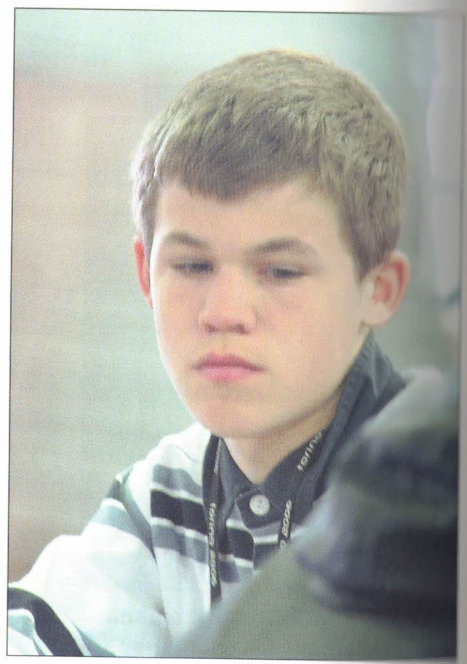


Another great Armenian player Vladimir Akopian.

Grandmaster and world-class analyst Sergey Shipov.

The new generation: the two greatest talents of the 21st century so far: Sergey Karjakin from Ukraine...

... and Norwegian top talent Magnus Carlsen.



So the juxtaposition that night of a Soviet citizen with two men from US intelligence agencies was noteworthy in itself, but there was some unexpected fallout from that blitz tournament. Less than a week later I received a call from the FBI, requesting an interview. In all they came to our house three times over the next month or so, with one interview being conducted by two agents, the others by just one. I can recall something of what was said. Upon entering our living room agent X said 'That was a nice job you did in Cuba.' (Referring to my part in the Ivanov defection.) So the FBI knew about that, even though I had dealt only with Canadian embassy personnel. I murmured thanks, but then noticing that we had left a realistic-looking toy gun on a table. I pointed it out and said 'That's only a water pistol.' 'I know', he replied soberly, 'I'm an arms expert.' Friendly in demeanor, he asked disarming questions which explored my background and personal characteristics and even professed an interest in possibly renting our BVI house in order to gain more information about it. Finally he brought up the blitz tournament, and asked about Yuri Barsukov. Agent X told me that the FBI knew Yuri was a KGB agent, at least a major in rank! It was clear that they were tapping Barsukov's phone and had heard me inviting Yuri to our house.

The series of extensive interviews seemed to oscillate between probing for whatever information I had about Barsukov (none) and determining whether I myself might have some sinister connection with the matter. My activities were certainly enough to arouse the FBI's suspicions: there were my contacts with Soviet cultural attaché Lev Zaitsev, who was later labeled as a KGB agent by an émigré Soviet GM; there were my three trips to Cuba, and my part in Igor Ivanov's defection (which for all the FBI knew could have been a fabricated event designed to implant a Soviet into our country!); and now the Barsukov affair. Paraphrasing what Goldfinger said to James Bond, one incident is happenstance, two could be coincidental, but three contacts merited high suspicion. And if the FBI's investigation had been thorough enough to uncover our (inadvertent) blueberry picking for the Communist party, then it would have been surprising if they didn't take me into custody!

At one point they asked me to evaluate Barsukov's chess game, and I replied 'He's a good player but he's prone to occasional blunders, and then he comes out with an expletive.' Agent X said later 'We're fighting a war here, you know', as if to call upon my patriotism, but I knew nothing of any significance, they were looking up a blind alley in this instance. They apparently already knew a lot about Barsukov, though, because a few months later the *New York Times* carried an article about the expulsion from the US of Yuri Barsukov, described as a Soviet reporter and a KGB agent. Barsukov had lived in Washington DC for about 20 years.

Recently, through the Freedom of Information Act, I obtained my FBI record, or what little of it they allowed me to see. They indicated that my file was 20 pages long and they were withholding nine of these. Of those pages I did receive, only two were free from deletions, and sometimes the deletions were extensive.

Given my three trips to Cuba, involvement with the defection of a Soviet citizen, and contacts with two KGB agents, it was entirely reasonable that my dossier came into being, considering the nature of the Cold War and the tense US-Cuba relationship. I had requested my records out of curiosity, wanting to see what the FBI said about my activities, particularly Igor's defection and the Barsukov interviews. But there was nothing left of either subject. All they allowed me to see were the dates and flight numbers of my first trip to Cuba (for which the State Department gave me permission) and references to our bank and credit ratings, Mimi's salary, our criminal records (none), and their investigation at our previous address in New York. Nothing else. I had heard many instances of the FBI's obsession with security years before 9/11 2001, and it was interesting to see an example of it at first hand. But hey! It's certainly healthier for the US to have a Freedom of Information Act than not, even if the agencies can deprive it of much of its meaning.

The other blitz tournament that deserves mention was the final one, in 1990, and it was a fitting way to end an era since we had the strongest field of players ever seen in our house. At that time Nigel Short was staying with Lubosh, who was helping him prepare for his upcoming World Championship match against Kasparov. There was also a small tournament nearby organized by David Mehler which featured two Soviet grandmasters, Alexey Dreev and Vladimir Epishin, as well as grandmaster-to-be Maurice Ashley. This was a juxtaposition of circumstances that had to be taken advantage of, so I was quite happy when all of the aforementioned players (except Kasparov of course) agreed to participate in our blitz. My friend Mike Senkiewicz came down from New York on short notice, and I tried to round up the strongest locals possible.

Nigel was then at a new peak in his career, and it was interesting to see the two Soviets take respectful measure of him when he arrived. Someone had expressed a preference for a small field, so I did not include myself among the entrants. Nigel noticed this and urged me to play. I indicated two other players who had come just to watch, and he welcomed them into the field as well. We certainly appreciated this.

When Nigel and I played, it was a French Defense, and I said 'Fischer-Hook, Siegen Olympiad, 1970.' 'Yes, I know', and he followed Fischer's

moves exactly, deep into the opening. 'After the game, Fischer showed me where I had gone wrong.' 'That, I do *not* know' and Nigel, in quite good humor, proceeded to crush me after I varied.

Later, Short lost a little of his equanimity when he was upset by Greg Acholonu, one of Washington's better speed players. And I won with black against Alexey Dreev in what Ashley called 'a good game'. Wow!! A wonderful feeling for me, and probably a shock for Alexey. Vladimir Epishin won the tournament, scoring 11-1, losing only to local Walter Morris. Dreev, Kavalek and Short tied for second at 9-3, and Maurice Ashley was 5th at 7-5.

There was no possible way to top that event, and for that reason alone I forbore organizing anything for quite some time. Then the chess scene in the Washington area changed substantially in 1992, but in covering the subject of blitzes which occurred over many years I have wreaked havoc with the chronology, so at this point to keep some semblance of order we have to revert to the mid-80's.

The 1984 Olympiad was held in Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest city, and the opening ceremonies were in a large oval arena. The hundreds of players, officials, friends, and chess fans didn't come close to filling all the available seats, while the section opposite the stage was jam-packed with Greeks. The usual welcoming speeches from FIDE officials and our hosts elicited suitable responses from the chess crowd, while the Greek section was quiet. After the ceremonies, the Greek chess federation had arranged for a program of their country's popular music, no doubt at considerable expense, as the performers included many of their brightest stars as well as Greece's most popular composer. As soon as the first musicians appeared on stage there was an enthusiastic roar from the Greeks. They loved their music, and I found the lilting melodies and unusual instruments very pleasant to my unaccustomed ears. Some of the Greeks' zeal seemed to initially infect the chess crowd, but after half a dozen numbers I was sorry to see some players leaving, while others moved about to speak to their chess friends. This seemed to me rudeness both to the performers and our hosts. Regrettable.

The warmth of the Greek music was echoed by the kindnesses of the local officials. Ever friendly and helpful, the Greek temperament seemed to impart a joie de vivre upon the Olympiad. This was most particularly evidenced by the scene at the Hotel Capsis, where a number of teams were housed. After the day's games were over, players gathered in the large lobby for an ongoing party, throughout the Olympiad. Except for one night.

In a tradition that began in 1980 and continues to this day, the Bermuda teams have thrown their own Olympiad parties, which have become famous.

Now upon their having found a suitable site, I went with them when they went to complete some arrangements with a bar owner, and the place didn't look promising. On a seedy back street on the second floor was a large room with a bare wooden floor, a bar in one corner, some simple chairs and tables, no decorations. A few male customers were there and three of them were languidly going through the motions of a traditional men's dance in time with a staticky sound system.

However, the Bermudans spread the word, inviting everyone at the Olympiad, and on the night of the party it seemed that everyone came! Arriving a little late, I found the tavern crammed with dancing, talking, and drinking bodies. Working my way to the bar with some difficulty, I found the joyously sweating owner and a few helpers trying to keep up with drink orders. I facetiously asked him 'How's business?' and he said that this one night would enable him to vacation for three months. Not the reply of an ambitious entrepreneur, but it was the answer of a man who knew how to live. The Bermuda party has enlivened all succeeding Olympiads.

Prior to the opening ceremonies, our hosts had prepared an elaborate buffet of Greek delicacies for us, and the very first in line among hundreds of chess players was my friend Craig Vantilbury, of the US Virgin Islands. Craig must have decided he liked the idea of being first, because he ultimately won the gold medal for top board! Later Alexander Beliavsky joined Craig on the awards platform to receive a lesser medal for his first-board battles against strong grandmasters, while Craig achieved his high score against a weaker field, just as I had when winning the gold in 1980. Later, Craig told me he felt uncomfortable about receiving a higher award than Beliavsky. Little noticed was the Olympic debut of 14-year-old Viswanathan Anand. His 7½-3½ score was the barest hint of an astonishing chess career yet to come.

At the FIDE meetings, the Greek chess federation came up with an interesting proposal. In view of their Olympic tradition, which was begun in the glory days of their civilization, they proposed to host the chess Olympiad every four years, to coincide with the Olympic years for all other sports. Under the plan the Olympiads in the intervening years would be put up for bids by other countries as was then the normal procedure. It was a very generous offer, since the cost of operating Olympiads was prodigious, and sometimes FIDE would have to make last-minute scrambles to find a willing host country.

From the Greek point of view this plan would solidify their identification with the Olympic spirit, which has always been a matter of historic pride for their country. A disadvantage from the players' view was that they had always found it of great interest to visit new countries, and this plan would decrease those opportunities by half. The delegates decided to accept the Greek bid

for 1988, and reconsider the idea at that time. (FIDE ultimately rejected the offer at the second Olympiad in Thessaloniki four years later, despite the pleasures of Greek cuisine.)

The 1984 results saw the USSR winning handily with 41-15, England 37-19, and USA 35-21. Craig Vantilbury took the individual gold medal with 9½-1½. The BVI finished 80th out of 88. I scored 7-7. Among the women it was USSR 32-10, Bulgaria 27½-14½, and Romania 27-15.

En route home I took a detour to visit Crete, where in ancient times the Minoan culture thrived. It was here in the Labyrinth that Theseus was said to have slain the Minotaur, but no charges were ever filed.

On Cooper Island, at a time when the Kavaleks were visiting us, Irena and I decided to make the 3-hour circuit along the shore, as it was another of those delightful days. We had finished with our beachcombing on the windward shore and came up to John Leonard's shack; he was off-island, fishing. We were surprised to run into a couple of unfamiliar men; one was lying in a hammock while the other was getting some water. (Except for John's place, the windward side of Cooper was usually deserted.) Upon greeting them we found that they were Spanish-speaking, and they said they were tourists. That seemed most unlikely. Tourists invariably confined themselves to the beach club area on the island's lee side; the steep climb over the hill is daunting, even if one found the obscure path. As Irena and I started the climb to the other side, we caught a glimpse of some other people in a grove of trees.

We were still in the beach club when John arrived in his boat. He had come home, discovered the strangers, and came around to use the island's only phone (at that time) to call the police. John was already gone when the police launch arrived, so I guided four officers over the hill. Unexpectedly there were 29 people hiding out among the trees, including some women. Only one officer was armed, but the police displayed unhesitating courage in arresting the large group in an uncertain situation, and we all trekked back to the beach club and launch.

The aliens were from the Dominican Republic, and each had paid $500 to a smuggler to be taken to USA-owned territory where they hoped for a better, poverty-free life. One man was an ex-policeman, another said he had sold his shack to pay for the voyage. The smugglers had dropped them off on Cooper Island on some pretext, saying they would be back. The aliens were all returned to their country, even poorer than before.

Of course, a number of officially authorized aliens have come to Cooper Island, and some of them were even chess players! A North Carolina master once showed up at the beach club, and Swedish IM Lars-Ake Schneider sailed up from nearby St. Croix on a boat piloted by John Turner, a USVI veteran of

several Olympiads. This surprise visit gave me a much needed blitz fix. At one point the US Chess Federation thought it would be a good idea for one of their grandmasters to make a good-will visit to various Caribbean federations, so John Fedorowicz spent a night at our house. The BVI players, isolated as they are, were really appreciative of John's visit.

The Puerto Ricans hosted the Caribbean Zonal tournament in 1985, in San Juan. Even better, my roommate was Craig Vantilbury and he brought his guitar, which he played somewhat tentatively in off moments. Craig's music was still developing, and he would soon play gigs with a St. Croix group, and later he would be touring the States with Joey Dee's Starlighters, the originators of the Peppermint twist.

The Zonal was well organized by Narciso Rabell Mendez, as were all other tournaments of his that I attended. This was my third Zonal, and I finished in the lower half of the field, as usual. The Cubans had the preponderance of chess strength in the Caribbean, and they took the first three places. At the age of sixty, I still loved these tournaments!

Painting and Photography

In 1985 I had been painting in isolation for some years without seeking to exhibit. Then an acquaintance joined a cooperative art gallery, had a show and received favorable reviews. Because the Touchstone Gallery generally exhibited good work and was frequently reviewed, I was motivated to give it a try. Cooperative galleries are run by groups of artists who use them as a stepping stone to what they hope will be a successful career with topflight commercial galleries. Some cooperatives are more prestigious than others, but there is a lot of membership turnover and fortunes change. The members usually get a show every two years or so, and if a new applicant's work is accepted for exhibition, then he joins the group as well.

In selecting my three paintings for the Touchstone jury I had to decide whether to submit works that were the best of the various styles I explored, or to present a unified sample within one genre. Throughout my career my approach to painting has been somewhat atypical; most artists settle into one style and seek to develop that particular means of expression, while I was continually diverted by new ideas. Many gallery owners are wedded to presenting shows with unified themes. (Perhaps they feel that their customers are only capable of digesting one idea at a time!) I once took some of my paintings to a gallery, and the owner said that I would qualify for about six shows, but after telling him that these were isolated explorations without a supporting body of work in any one style, he decided not to give me an exhibition.

There are pros and cons of using and developing one idea. If the artist's approach is consistent, the work becomes instantly identifiable as his, particularly if he develops the motif to a rich maturity which would constitute a unique means of expression. Well and good. So what then? Having achieved (presumably) critical acclaim for his intellectual breakthrough, does he continue to rework the same approach, seeking ever more variant means of presenting his one idea? Doesn't this run the risk of stagnation? And isn't the continued pursuit of one theme more akin to seeking different ways of rendering the old, rather than seeking the new? Has the creative spark been left behind? These are the sorts of questions that have concerned me throughout my painting career. The case of the Italian painter Giorgio De Chirico comes to mind. In the early 20th century he created a series of melancholy cityscapes featuring late afternoon shadows that gained critical acclaim. After a while he went on to exploring other themes, but none of the new motifs

was well received. Years later he was poverty-stricken and desperate, so he mounted an exhibition in the style of his early successes, but this show was roundly denounced by the critics. They argued that the De Chirico 'new' works were not inspired by compulsive creative needs, but that he was merely imitating himself! While De Chirico failed at seeking new frontiers, the most obvious success story in this vein is Picasso, who didn't dwell too long on any one of his career phases, but continually came up with dazzling innovative concepts.

To return from my digression, the three paintings I submitted to the Touchstone gallery were qualitatively my best, but represented radically different styles. This sort of approach had succeeded for me some years before, when I won the Tiffany Foundation grant, chosen by a highly qualified panel. But in this case the cooperative artists rejected my work, and I was shocked. My acquaintance sat on the jury, and said I had lost by one vote. One juror, looking at my skillful representational painting and the two abstracts said that I'd 'taken a wrong turn.' Rejections were not unfamiliar to me, so I bore up as well as possible, but this one really hurt.

I continued painting, and did some of my finest work in the next year or two. I had evolved a technique (on my own, but used by some other artists) of pouring quick-drying liquid acrylic paints on my canvas which lay on the floor, employing a spoon and palette knife for control, (no brushes) and cultivating thin translucent washes while building up richness of color and texture. The mode was abstract, and generally biomorphic in content, which suggested the influence of my undersea experiences. It was a painstaking process, often taking months to complete a canvas, which usually measured 50x60 inches.

Painting is a completely solitary endeavor, and my psyche was well adapted to being a persevering loner. But the Touchstone Gallery rejection must have eaten away at my resolve to paint, for one day I took our 35mm camera into downtown Washington to take some double exposures. It was merely intended as an experimental creative exercise; I didn't realize at the time that this little jaunt was symptomatic of a serious crisis of confidence in my career as a painter.

Walking around Washington with a camera on a beautiful day is indeed enjoyable, and in this case my self-imposed requirement of creating double exposures was particularly stimulating. Not having a darkroom at home, my methodology was necessarily cumbersome. Setting the camera at one half the usual exposure, I would photograph some scene of special interest, noting the location of objects within the frame, and then find another subject which would blend appropriately with the first half of the photograph. This technique generated a high number of failures, but occasionally a few dazzling results. The successes might come from unusual juxtapositions of subjects or from the creation of abstract qualities. In both cases, there were some delightful surprises when receiving the photos from the processor, since a complete visualization in the field of the final prints is not realizable. The technique might be described as intelligently guided approximations which sometimes hit the mark beautifully. Of course if I'd had a darkroom my knowledge of composition would have enabled me to create successful combinations at a deliberate pace, but the somewhat serendipitous aspect of my methodology was appealing to me.

It so happened that my efforts on that very first day produced a striking photo which captivated me. Sold on the technique, I was impelled to take my camera around Washington, Baltimore, museums, harbors, seeking ever new combinations. I found cemetery statuary particularly intriguing for my purposes. These exploratory trips gradually consumed more and more time, until I suddenly realized it had been many months since I worked on canvas. And as I write this, 17 years more have passed! There had never been any conscious decision to quit painting, but I was genuinely fascinated by my photographic efforts and it is clear that my change of career at age 60 has been definitive. And while self-analysis is a tricky business, it nevertheless seems equally obvious that the rejection from the Touchstone Gallery had been a breaking point, even though I painted for two more years.

My painting life was like a roller-coaster. Years of privation, then winning some small prizes followed by three successful competitions for major grants. Fame seemed to beckon with the winning of the Tiffany, which was an extraordinary achievement. But then came a series of failed attempts to get a good gallery connection, each try disheartening. Finally an insignificant exhibition at a poorly regarded gallery, and more years of painting in seclusion. As with most roller-coasters, I seem to have landed at the bottom. No regrets however, I'm proud of the works I have created.

My absorption with double exposures continued, and the most interesting results were from cemeteries. At one point I motored from Boston to Miami, covering the graveyards in the major cities. And on chess Olympiad trips I would make photographic detours for the same purpose. European cemeteries are wonderful! A much neglected attraction for tourists, as well as photographers.

These efforts culminated in a New York exhibition of cemetery photos, in a gallery where Ansel Adams had shown years before. Three other shows were held there concurrently, and there were some nice comments from my fellow exhibitors, but nothing further resulted. Come to think of it, cemetery photos are probably not a hot sales item! It was good to see many old friends again, though, at the opening.

After the show I have continued my keen interest in cemetery statuary, but have reverted to single exposures. To do doubles without darkroom manipulation is sacrificing desirable control in a quixotic quest for elusive images, and I had no desire to get involved in the more technical aspects of photography. Also, along the way I had developed a deeper appreciation of 'normal' photos by visiting exhibitions. So in later Olympiad years I revisited some of the great European cemeteries, with just one exposure per frame this time. A different approach, but an equally demanding procedure in its own way.

Considering my growing absorption in photography, it was only natural to increase my output of chess photos. Starting in 1957 I had taken my camera to chess clubs occasionally, and now that the Olympiad spectacles were available to me every two years, it was an opportunity to take advantage of. There were also the annual World Opens and New York Opens, at which foreign grandmasters were appearing in increasing numbers. Consequently, I began submitting photos to chess magazines in the late eighties, and was soon a regular contributor. Applying innate pictorial skills to my beloved chess world, I found a pursuit which has given me great pleasure. More of this later.

When the United Arab Emirates was given the right to hold the 27th Olympiad in Dubai, the question of Israeli participation instantly became an issue. Despite FIDE regulations that Olympiads are open to all dues-paying member states, the UAE barred the Israelis because of the bitter hostility of Arabic countries toward the Jewish nation. Israel was willing to send a team, and the idea was even discussed of having their players transmit the moves from a ship lying offshore. This effort at compromise failed, and many countries were discussing a possible boycott of this Olympiad. Finally, Israel ceased their efforts to attend the event, and in the interest of FIDE unity sent a message abroad which indicated their 'understanding' should their sympathizing allies elect to send teams to Dubai. Ultimately the Netherlands, Norway and a couple of other countries chose not to attend because of this issue, but Israel's message saved the Olympiad from a wider rift.

In their efforts to win favor, the UAE provided free air fares for the teams of many of the poorer member nations. This gesture was gratefully welcomed by the BVI; a round trip ticket from our country to Dubai is a big chunk of money. Despite this unexpected generosity though, our tiny federation still could not organize a full team, so I called upon a good friend, Vince Moore, to join us in Dubai. In those days FIDE did not pay close attention to the residency requirements, particularly in the case of such insignificant federations as ours. There was a bare semblance of legality of Vince's playing for

the BVI; he lived in our Maryland home when we went to the islands, so it might be said that he was a custodian of overseas BVI territory! (So I'm not a lawyer.)

Vince had a keen interest in US chess politics, so the opportunity to observe similar machinations on an international scale was very appealing to him. He was quite compatible with our other team members, played well, and seemed to have a great time.

It was FIDE elections time again, with Lincoln Lucena of Brazil running against incumbent Campomanes for the presidency. Our team was closely divided, and we had quite an animated discussion on the issue, in which Vince correctly did not participate. And once again Campo won, with much of his strength coming from third world countries. I must say that during his tenure Campo was very helpful to the BVI, sending us a generous shipment of chess sets, clocks and a demonstration board, and even visiting our remote islands. With tiny federations such as ours, this sort of thing carries a lot of weight.

The accommodations in Dubai were superb. Our team stayed in the Chicago hotel, located on a fine beach. (Fortunately the UAE has a good supply of sand!) The food was great, with choices at each meal of Continental, Oriental, Indian, Italian and Middle Eastern cuisines. And the stirring opening ceremony took place at night in an outdoor sports arena. (No fear of rain here.)

The downtown area of Dubai is quite interesting for a first-time visitor to an Arabic country. I went to the gold market to buy something for Mimi, and found an area of several blocks filled with nothing but jewelry stores, and not a sign of a policeman anywhere. It was clear that the penalty of severed hands for theft was a potent deterrent. While looking for lunch with a teammate one day we entered a restaurant and found every customer eating with his hands, the usual custom in that part of the world. My teammate made a hasty retreat.

Once, while in the Hilton where the Olympiad took place, I was looking for a minor official in the hotel's complex of offices in order to take care of a trivial matter, when I inadvertently headed into an area where a local nabob was visiting. Upon being stopped by one of several armed guards, I explained my quest, and he pointed me in the right direction, but as I turned he quite gratuitously gave me a hard shove. I looked back, and saw a look of self satisfaction. Arabs have a reputation for hospitality, but it seems this fellow was sending a different message of some unfathomable motivation. On the other hand, my apartment was on the periphery of the Chicago hotel grounds, and it became reassuring as I came home late at night to always see a robed silent figure standing in the gloom, at least after the first heart leap.

As VIP guests we were generally well looked after, but I had the impression of a rigidly structured society that had little tolerance for diversity.

The UAE is a wealthy country, so this next anecdote should be put into that context, and it might then seem less surprising. One of the leading local chess players let it be known that he wanted a house as compensation for playing on the UAE team! He did not get the house, and he was removed from their roster.

I was surprised to run into Sam Sloan, a well known figure in US chess who was living in Dubai at the time. He wrote a daily chess column in a local English-language newspaper during the Olympiad.

For the fifth time in their seven Olympiads the BVI was paired with Finland, and as I lost here to Yrjölä, this brought my score against my forebears' country to minus one. Since my Finnish parents died when I was 17 and 20, I had long lost contact with Finns, until the Olympiads came into my life. Yet despite having spent my adult years in a different world, I felt inexplicably drawn to these foreigners who seemed familiar, and I loved hearing the language again. When I reached back in my memory to attempt expressing a thought in Finnish someone exclaimed 'He's speaking children's language!' That made sense, since I was a child when I last spoke Finnish with any regularity. At any rate, I enjoyed hanging out with the Finns in Dubai, and took individual photos of the men's and women's teams.

The tournament started with a controversy in the very first round, when Puerto Rico refused to play England. This came about when a Puerto Rican player was given an incorrect lower rating, resulting in their team being paired against a stronger rather than a weaker opponent. This mistake was spotted well before the round and could easily have been rectified, but it was not. So Puerto Rico forfeited 4-0 amidst great criticism directed against the pairing committees as well as the Caribbean team. Many thought that playing against such a strong team would be a privilege, not an injustice.

The USSR were strong favorites once again, but in the 8th round the USA defeated them 2½-1½, with Yasser Seirawan upsetting World Champion Garry Kasparov. This knocked the Soviets down in the standings and a tight three-team race developed. Entering the last round, the scores were USA 36½, USSR 36, and England 35½. In the finale, USSR and England both won 4-0 against Poland and Brazil respectively, while the USA could only draw with Bulgaria 2-2. It seems that the old axiom, 'luck favors the strong', held true once more.

The USSR finished with 40-16, England 39½-16½, USA 38½. The BVI came in 102nd out of 108 teams and I scored 7½-4½. Vishy Anand scored 7½-3½, on first board for India. The Soviet women also won, ahead of 48 teams, with Hungary and Romania 2nd and 3rd.

Meeting Craig Vantilbury was by itself a chance contact in the pinball game we call life. Now Craig's ricochet put us in touch with his father, an otherwise unlikely occurrence which would profoundly affect our lives on Cooper Island. After visiting us, Craig told his father (Jack) of our struggles without electricity and trying to cope with propane refrigerators which died after a couple of years' use. By great good fortune for us, Jack was an expert on solar power, and he eventually came to Cooper to set up our first electrical system, using solar panels on the roof. What a delight! No more gloomy battery lights, just press a wall switch. How much there is in industrialized countries that we take for granted! Jack has since died, but we shall always be grateful to him. Mimi (who is clearly the techie in our family) has kept up with developments and we have twice upgraded our system, so that we can now maintain a good fridge, plenty of lights, microwave and blender, computers, TV and ceiling fans. In our remote environment these improvements have been a major revolution.

In 1987 word came through the chess grapevine that a friend was making frequent visits to the casinos of Atlantic City, which was a four hour drive from Washington. Back when I was playing twenty-one, I had become quite fond of casino atmospheres in San Juan and Nevada, and had never gambled in Atlantic City, so I was naturally curious to see what that scene was like, even though I was reluctant to return to playing blackjack. It was a big surprise to me when my friend's preoccupation turned out to be with slot machines, generally considered to be a poor bet in the gamblers' world. When he showed me around, the whirring, clicking, bell ringing and garish colors assaulted my senses, and I couldn't distinguish one machine from another. But gradually the sometimes significant differences became apparent, and I learned that occasionally there were some sporting chances available for those with a gambler's frame of mind. Frequently large investments of both time and money were made in pursuit of that very rare occurrence, a jackpot. If the jackpot was available on a bank of several machines, then a competing player would probably win it before you could. Or even if after many hours you did hit the big prize, sometimes the amount of money expended was more than the jackpot was worth, and all you managed to do was suffer a small loss and avoid a big disaster. The phrase 'many hours' as used above, means much longer than a tournament chess game, and 'Sitzfleisch' is an important asset. As is apparent, I enmeshed myself in this new endeavor, to the point that it became addictive. For a couple of years I spent far too much time in Atlantic City, depriving myself of sleep and stumbling back to my hotel room after utterly wearying, losing sessions.

Why immerse one's self in such seeming folly? For one thing, the jackpot amounts are very high in relation to individual bets, so substantial financial

rewards are possible, and emotionally, hitting the big one is a terrific high. Also, in 1987 in Atlantic City there were a lot of progressive jackpot banks, in which a small fraction of each bet made is added to the jackpot, so that in time these increments add up to a very lucrative amount. Competing against other players on a progressive bank of machines fit right in with my gamesman's mentality. In what is known as straight slots, no playing skills are required, only correct bet management and courage to endure long periods of adversity. When video poker gained popularity, playing strategies became important, though they were not nearly as challenging as chess. The lure, of course, is money, and to attain the gambler's thrill one must risk sums that have significant meaning to the bettor. Since we are not millionaires, the amounts I bet are indeed significant.

The casinos exercise shrewd methods to draw players deeper into their web. The regular customers are given plastic cards with an ID number, and these are inserted into the machine. As one plays, credits are accumulated which may be used for cash back or complimentary meals. The most favored regulars are given entry into private clubs, fed gourmet dinners, and provided with free hotel stays. Additionally, there are weekly giveaways of merchandise, some of it quite desirable, and free entries into slot tournaments where one competes against two or three hundred others for large prizes.

On one trip to the Gulf Coast, the casino sent this limousine to the New Orleans airport for me. En route during the 30-mile drive I talked the driver into stopping in this cemetery so I could take photos. (A sort of unusual casino benefit!)

This casino limousine took me to the cemetery

After a couple of years, Mimi came to Atlantic City with me, learned the ropes, and now when we are in Maryland we still visit the casinos more

weekends than not. What can I say? Of course from one perspective gambling can be written off as a colossal (even foolish) waste of time. But the same might be said of movies, TV, various hobbies, even (heaven forbid) chess! In gambling we know enough to keep our balance books quite close to even, and we both enjoy the casinos and the pampered life style that comes with it. *Chacun à son gout!*

In 1988 the BVI chess federation actually organized an open Swiss tournament! We sent out invitations to various Caribbean federations, and I called up Narciso Rabell Mendez, who ran Puerto Rico chess at that time, and he said he would tell the leading Puerto Rican players about our tournament. In the meantime, I personally invited some US masters whom I knew quite well. So those who came to the BVI from the States were GM Arthur Bisguier, IM Richard DeLaune, IM Steve Odendahl, and my old friend Mike Senkiewicz. DeLaune and his wife, Odendahl and Mike spent several days at our house before the tournament, and Bisguier came out to Cooper Island afterward.

The attendance was very disappointing; aside from the Americans, only one other player came, from El Salvador. We had been counting upon a good turnout from the nearby Puerto Ricans, but Narciso Rabell never mentioned the tournament to them! I spoke to a Puerto Rican player later, and he said they certainly would have come if they had known. Also, on the eve of the tournament I was notified that the promised prize fund was cut in half! It was mortifying for me to inform the players of this when they had already paid for their air fares.

Aside from the above problems, the tournament went very well. Playing conditions and accommodations were good, just one round per day, and Carol Jarecki came to direct. On our free day, local player Henry Pickering was able to put a 46-foot sailboat at our disposal, and we had a great day of sailing, picnicking and swimming. Surprisingly, I tied for first place with Steve Odendahl. (Home court advantage, perhaps.) The other US players, Bisguier, DeLaune, Senkiewicz, tied for third.

The facilities for chess in the BVI are good, and the islands are beautiful. Should we ever hold another tournament here, the prize money must certainly be guaranteed, as is the norm elsewhere, and invitations and other details must be worked out well in advance. We can learn from our 1988 experience.

Another Caribbean island federation has already set a fine example in tournament organization. In the 1980's a series of open tournaments was held on the French side of St. Martin. Very good prizes, careful planning, and a graded choice of accommodations resulted in fine fields of players from

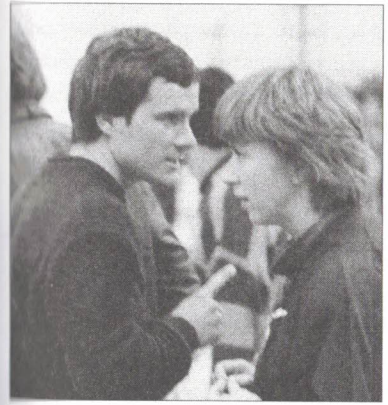
the USA and Europe as well as Latin American countries. I played there in one of the last years, rooming with Mike Senkiewicz, and found it to be a great tournament. GM Margeir Petursson of Iceland won that year.

In 1988 I chose a roundabout route to the 2nd Thessaloniki Olympiad, via Vienna, Budapest and Belgrade in order to photograph their cemeteries. Vienna and Budapest were wonderful for this purpose, and Belgrade less so. While in Budapest I called Pal Benko, who spent part of each year there, and asked about chess clubs. He said there would be a strong monthly blitz taking place the next night. Aside from Pal, about 60 players participated, and I finished somewhere in the middle. It was a pleasant surprise to see the Andorran team there, in Budapest to receive some last-minute pre-Olympiad training. Just as most grandmasters generally know each other, we weaker Olympiad players are well acquainted, and it was good to see the Andorrans again.

The teams were reunited in Thessaloniki again and found the Greeks still lobbying to hold the event on their soil every fourth year, but they were voted down, as previously mentioned. Still, it was very pleasant to experience their warm hospitality once more.

The BVI was short a player, so this time I called on Mike Senkiewicz to fill out our roster, and no one seemed to notice. Mike is laid back and gets along with everyone, so he made a fine teammate.

I brought along a lot of film to cover the Olympiad in greater depth, but I had experimented with a cheaper product, whose prints turned out to be too grainy. It was a thoughtless non-professional type of mistake, and it cost me when the Olympiad's biggest story broke. This was during the last years of the cold war, and world-wide headlines were created when the captain of the American team, John Donaldson, suddenly eloped with Elena Akhmilovskaya, a player for the Soviet women's team. The playing hall was abuzz with the news, and when the photo journalists took stock it turned out that I was the only one who had a photo of the two lovers together! When the photo was taken, I hadn't even known whom John Donaldson was talking with so earnestly. There were quite a few envious smiles when I showed the photo to the other newsmen, but a Dutch journalist opined that the photo wasn't sharp enough to be used. Nevertheless, I called Time magazine in New York, told them what I had, and sent it to their office on the first available plane. It turned out that the photo was indeed too grainy, they did not use it but later reimbursed me for the fifty dollars required to ship it. The only place the picture appeared was in a Swedish chess magazine, thanks to Jan Berglund.



John Donaldson and Elena Akhmilovskaya just before they eloped

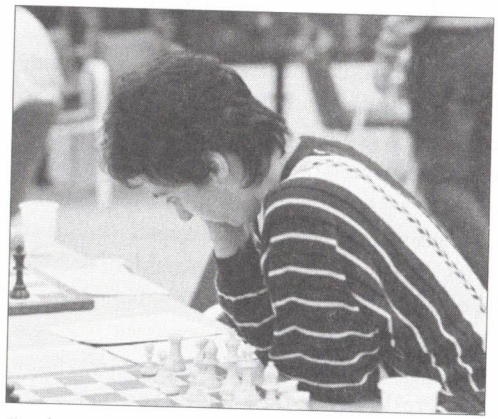
Had I properly prepared myself for my new vocation, the folly of using inferior film to save money would have been avoided. But I never read manuals or specifications, and I can be categorized as a sub-tech or even anti-tech. I have an understanding of only my camera, and that just barely, which fits in with my scoring a mere three percent out of a possible one hundred on a mechanical aptitude test taken at the age of 18. What I *do* have is a painter's eye, with an excellent grasp of color, light and composition. And judging from the results, that seems to be enough.

Just being in Thessaloniki, or at any Olympiad for that matter, is a wondrous, exhilarating experience, and having my old friend Mike along made it even better. We went on long exploratory walks, and one day we climbed the hills which overlooked the city. When Mike complained about the steep gradient, I forged ahead, feeling zestful, and kidded him, pointing out that at 63 I was 18 years older and carrying a weighty camera bag to boot. It couldn't have been more than a few minutes later that I received a deserved comeuppance for having flaunted my physical condition. An alarming pain in my chest brought me to an abrupt halt. Then, very slowly, we walked down to the Olympiad headquarters, where there was a Libyan doctor on duty. He diagnosed angina pectoris, and told me to move about cautiously until a doctor back home could examine me. Looking back on this incident later, I felt it was one of numerous events which seemed to occur with appropriate timing, or with patterns that suggested significance. Was it coincidental that I was stricken immediately after having teased Mike about our relative physical conditioning? Was it coincidental when I ridiculed a movie for having a scene in which a Japanese pilot strafed a tennis court, only to quickly learn that my nurse had been wounded at Pearl Harbor on a tennis court? Design or happenstance? What about all of those 'chance' encounters that resulted

in sharp swerves in my life path? Catching sight of a newspaper ad which said 'play chess by mail'. A man at the door offering to send me to art school, when I had no future prospects. The very narrow time frame in which I was able to meet Mimi. These hugely significant turning points: random bounces on life's pinball machine, or obscure design? But enough of this speculation, too heavy! Resume the film!

Soviet chess was awesome in those days, and the same adjective could be applied to the female players as well as the males. The Soviet women's team was a heavy favorite to cop the gold medal in 1988, and even after the shocking defection of Akhmilovskaya, the remaining three members were all very strong, and though they henceforth had to play every match without rest, the gold medal still seemed like money in the bank. But perhaps this capitalist phrase applied to the Communists was inappropriate, for things started to unravel for them. A very young Hungarian team (whose line-up of three Polgar sisters plus one seemed more like a publicity stunt than a serious effort to win the gold) was racking up the points and a very tight race developed.

Entering the last round with equal scores, the Hungarians could only manage a narrow 2-1 victory over Sweden, thus seeming to give the powerful Soviets a clear path to the gold medal, as they were paired against a considerably weaker Dutch team. But in a tremendous upset, the Netherlanders obtained a 1½-1½ draw and it was Hungarian gold! The Soviets were stunned, and for many long minutes afterward 2nd board Irina Levitina remained hunched over her table, trying to cope with their debacle.



Soviet second board Irina Levitina

The ladies' team scores were Hungary 33 points, USSR 32½, and Yugoslavia 28. As for the men, the Soviets' one-two punch of Kasparov and Karpov was just too strong and the USSR won gold with 40½ points, England and the Netherlands 34½. The BVI finished 100th out of 107 teams. I scored a disappointing 6-6.

The Olympiads often feature the international debuts of rapidly developing talents who would soon occupy center stage in the elite tournament circuits. Thessaloniki was the venue where I first caught sight of the Polgar sisters and Vasily Ivanchuk. The Polgars were a natural attraction for a photographer, but without any information on his playing strength, I only took Ivanchuk's picture because of the unusual way his eyebrows were joined! Seeing Max Dlugy (whom I knew) playing blitz with Anand, I was struck by the Indian's joie de vivre. Yet just one photo. If I had only guessed what a compelling force he would become!

After the Olympiad I spent a little while in the Athens cemetery with my camera, and then went to the island of Skiathos, where for the first time I met one of my few Finnish relatives. Pirjo had married an engaging Greek named Zinon, and my stay with them was quite enjoyable, despite my very slow movements caused by the heart problem. Upon my return home, an angiogram revealed narrowed arteries, but no drastic treatment was deemed necessary.

As the disquieting experience of my angina in Greece receded into the past my body seemed to be behaving well, and I gradually resumed normal behavior. This included trips to the casinos, and prolonged chases after progressive slot machine jackpots. In February of 1989 I was in Atlantic City for a full week, going from casino to casino and getting very little sleep Then, after nine or ten hours on one particularly stubborn machine, it happened: pain, nausea, disorientation. Someone else hit the jackpot, but I was only able to walk a short distance away before feeling compelled to sit down. An ambulance took me to the nearby hospital, but after six hours of waiting and a sporadic superficial examination, the doctors discharged me, and I slowly walked several blocks to my hotel. When I called my cardiologist he realized the import of my described symptoms and told me to get back into a hospital. 'It is too dangerous not to.' Again an ambulance came and took me to another hospital, where they correctly diagnosed a heart attack. An angioplasty was eventually administered to me, a procedure in which small balloons are inserted into the arteries to widen the passages. This kept me going for about 10 years.

The fall of 1989 found us with some free air mileage, so Mimi and I flew to Munich, where we stayed briefly with Kavalek's father and there met

grandmaster Lubomir Ftacnik. Our plan was to rent a car and head for Czechoslovakia, so Ftacnik gave us the phone number of International Master Aleš Pekarek in Prague, who would aid us in finding a hotel. This was shortly before the collapse of communism, and Prague and other cities were not yet prepared for the coming onslaught of tourists; hotel rooms were still very scarce. It was late at night before Aleš and his wife found us in a metro station, and they informed us that they had been unable to find any hotel vacancy, and that we were to stay in their apartment for the three days of our visit, while they would move in with Aleš's mother! This unexpected kindness from someone we'd never met overwhelmed us. Being a member of the world-wide chess community brings wonderful blessings on occasion.

Our delightful trip would take us on to Bratislava where we stayed at Ftacnik's spacious apartment, and then to Budapest and Vienna, with cemetery photo opportunities in each city. A chess player-equipped coffee house in Vienna was a nice find. To a European our trip might seem a prosaic equivalent of a drive from Washington to Boston, but we two Americans were still provincial enough to find Europe a fascinating funhouse, with new cultural experiences looming at every border crossing. Also, our swing into the two iron curtain countries added a mildly adventurous piquancy to our itinerary. We loved it.

In 1990 an opportunity came up to play in another Caribbean Zonal tournament, this time in Cuba. Unlike my two previous trips there, in which circuitous routes via Mexico and Jamaica were necessitated by the US embargo, this time it was possible to leave from Miami on a charter flight, used mostly by visiting Cuban relatives. The embargo was still in force of course, and there were restrictions against spending US dollars in Cuba, so I was carrying a limited amount of cash. Upon arrival in Miami I went to the charter company counter to purchase my ticket, and found that because of the US embargo credit cards were not accepted, cash only. I had known about this, but forgot about it. I was $35 short of the ticket price, the banks were already closed, I didn't know my credit card pin number, Mimi was unreachable, and at that time I had no knowledge about the use of ATM machines. The flight was scheduled to leave a few hours later, so I started calling Miami area chess players. Larry Kaufman and Arnold Denker were unavailable. Eventually I reached ex-Cuban Champion of long ago Juan Gonzalez, then in his seventies, whom I barely knew. Upon explaining my predicament, he very kindly agreed to drive to the airport and give me the needed $35! After thanking Dr. Gonzalez, back to the airline counter where I learned that a $15 airport tax was *not* included in the price of the

ticket! What to do? There was not enough time now to get help from any other chess player, even if I had a name to call. Should I solicit passersby? 'Excuse me sir, would you give me $15 so I could go play chess in Cuba?' Well, that would certainly be a novel approach, but perhaps unlikely to achieve the goal.

I dejectedly told the young ticket agent of my plight. It so happened that he was a recent Cuban immigrant with a hatred of the Castro regime, and he unhesitatingly stamped my ticket and said 'Go and beat those damn Cubans.' Wow! My self-inflicted crisis was miraculously resolved.

GM Eleazar Jimenez met my flight in Havana. A two-time tournament opponent, I found him very simpatico, and considered him a friend. He was quite interested in my Miami airport adventure, particularly about Dr. Gonzalez, who was a former colleague. In turn, Eleazar gave me news about Dr. Gonzalez's Cuban contemporaries, which I later relayed in a long thankful letter.

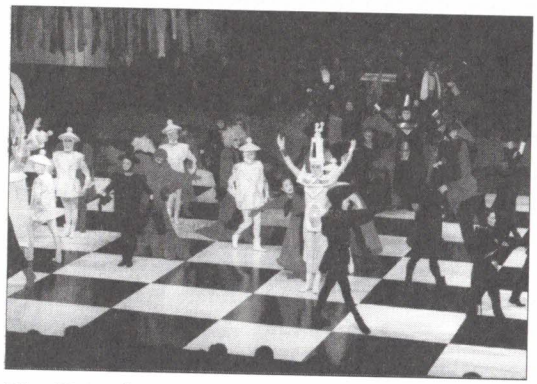
The tournament was held in Pinar Del Rio, a moderate-sized town in western Cuba, where it was possible to pick up TV signals from southern Florida. We stayed in a comfortable hotel, and tour groups from Canada and Finland passed through while we were there. Vantilbury couldn't make it, so the USVI player was John Turner, who was good company. On an off day we were taken to a bizarre landscape where we entered an extensive cave complex on foot and emerged later on a small boat. We were also shown a beautifully designed school for children with special talents. There was a huge well-equipped gym, three Olympic-sized swimming pools with high dive platforms, and a large classroom which was being used for chess instruction. Many of the children here would represent Cuba in future international competitions.

I took photos of all the players and officials and later sent prints to J.J. Hernandez, the head of the Cuban chess federation, who was surprised to receive them. On my previous visits an excellent Cuban chess magazine was being published, but by 1990 it had been forced to fold because of the paper shortage induced by the long-running US embargo.

Cuba dominates Caribbean chess, and their players took the top places in the Zonal tournament. The only noteworthy feature of my performance was eliciting a draw offer from GM Nogueiras, which I refused and then I promptly lost. Upon befriending a couple of young Cubans, they became excited when they saw I had a recent comprehensive book of chess openings, unavailable in their country. Not having dollars, they offered Cuban pesos, unspendable in the US. I finally took the pesos, and back in Havana bought a few Russian art books. The cab driver became much friendlier when he learned I was American rather than Russian.

The 1990 Olympiad took place in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, a medium-sized city a short drive from the capital, Belgrade. The players were dispersed in various hotels, and most if not all of the teams had a car put at their disposal! We immediately knew this chess-loving country would take good care of us, and this was confirmed when we saw the magnificent playing hall. It was housed in a huge modern building which also contained many offices, stores, restaurants, art galleries, press center, bank, skating rink, gymnasium, and very large swimming pools.

The opening ceremonies were mercifully brief, and the entertainment which followed was the best I've seen in 13 Olympiads. The Yugoslav National Ballet performed a beautiful chess-based work whose music, costumes and choreography were specially created for this occasion.

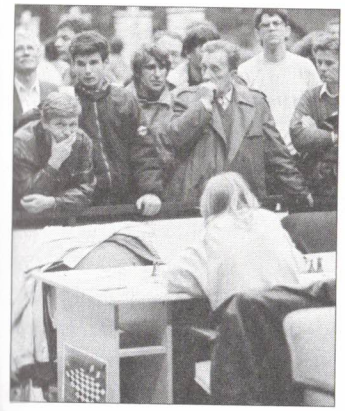


The Yugoslav National Ballet performance at the opening of the Novi Sad Olympiad

Wonderful!

An anomaly in the pairings had the BVI playing Hungary in the 2nd round, a much stronger opponent than usual for us. The Hungarians complained, since the BVI were not likely to score many points overall, and this would place Hungary at a disadvantage when opponents' points were totaled later for tie-breaking purposes in the final rankings. As it happened, I managed to draw with Ribli, giving Hungary ½ less point than expected, as their powerhouse team surely anticipated a 4-0 sweep against us.

The Swedes' IM Pia Cramling attracted attention. It was not the first time a woman had played on a men's team (Mrs. Kababe of Cyprus in Lugano in 1968, for example), but this was still a rarity, and she drew a crowd. Of course it was her playing strength that earned her a position on the team, and soon Judit Polgar would be playing regularly with the Hungarian men.



Pia Cramling draws a crowd

Elections once again, this time a three-cornered contest with Puerto Rican Narciso Rabell Mendez and Spaniard Roman Toran running against the perennial incumbent, Florencio Campomanes. The Soviet bloc (unified for the last time) weighed in with support for Campo, and so he won easily with 79 votes as opposed to 26 for Toran, and just 9 for Rabell Mendez.

Among the 108 men's teams the Soviets again won handily despite the absence of Kasparov and Karpov, who were occupied with their World Championship match. The scores were USSR 39-17, USA and England tied at 35½-20½ with the USA taking the silver medals on tiebreak. The BVI took 98th place, and I scored 9-4. In the women's group of 66 teams there was another epic struggle between the USSR and the Polgar-led Hungarians. At the end the teams were tied at 35-7, and Hungary took the gold medal after a Bucholz tie-break. Remarkably, the three Polgars each won a gold medal for their respective board results!

Toward the end of the Olympiad, news came that there would be a special award for the event's oldest player, and Victor Kortchnoi (age 60) was designated to receive it. As my age then was 65, I immediately went to the officials and ultimately was given a small chess painting, and had my photo taken with the youngest participant, a 10-year old Vietnamese boy.

After the Olympiad, I stayed on in Novi Sad for one extra day, exploring the moderately pleasant city. Nearing the tournament hall building I was surprised to find several thousand people massed there, shouting and holding signs. I did not understand the language, nor could I read the signs, but it was obvious that a fervent political rally was taking place. The scene elicited feelings of unease and repugnance in me; it was about the time that Slobodan Milosevic's star was ascending in Serbia. Some years later, Novi Sad's bridges would be destroyed by American bombers.

On the way home, I visited Fred and Marie Turim, who were living in Portugal's Algarve at that time. Fred and I drove to nearby Sevilla and we were surprised to hear my name called out on one of the city's streets. It was Brazilian GM Jaime Sunye Neto, who had stayed in our house in Maryland a while back. Jaime was in Sevilla for a post-Olympiad tournament. It seems chess is everywhere, but it's always a pleasant surprise to meet a friend unexpectedly in a foreign country.

Campomanes managed to organize the 1992 Olympiad in the Philippines, his home base, where he apparently had considerable influence. Manila was certainly an exotic, appealing destination, but the transportation costs from the BVI seemed an insuperable barrier to our sending a team. Our close neighbors, the US Virgin Islands, were having similar problems, and neither country could field a full lineup, let alone alternates. Then an enterprising player from the US island group named John Warlick had an inspired idea – why not send a combined team? That was certainly very helpful, but for me the expensive transportation costs were still prohibitive. Finally John, who was as desperate to go as I was, somehow came up with a free air ticket from Los Angeles to Manila, which he offered to me. I gratefully accepted, and then we had the minimum lineup of four. Fittingly, there were two players from each island group. If any of the officials later noticed our combined roster, they graciously said nothing. Apparently rules are not as rigidly enforced when it comes to tiny federations such as ours, as seemed to be the case earlier when I brought two needed non-islanders to fill out our lineup. That certainly is reasonable, when one considers that out of more than 100 teams we would be fighting for an inconsequential ranking of sixth or seventh above last place.

The timing of the Olympiad was such that en route to the west coast I was able to stop off in Las Vegas for two days to photograph the National Open. Since the camera work took only a short while at the beginning of each round, there was opportunity for a little gambling, and I was lucky to hit a $4,000 jackpot. Carrying thousands of dollars to Manila did not seem to be a good idea, so I deposited it with the casino until my return, and GM Ilya Gurevich went with me to the cashier's window as a witness in case anything went awry.

The opening ceremony in Manila was impressive, with president Corazon Aquino and president-elect Fidel Ramos on the podium with Campomanes. Campo did indeed have influence. The speeches were followed by a performance of the Bayanihan dancers, perhaps the Philippines' most famous entertainers. The theatre and playing hall were in a beautifully designed modern building, with our hotel a convenient five-minute walk away.

Our combined island team was quickly able to recruit a delightful team captain, in the person of Lisette Hodgson, the wife of English GM Julian Hodgson. She did a fine job, and her smiles were infectious.

Having only four players meant we each had to play every one of the 14 rounds, but even at age 67 the one game per day schedule was easy for me, when compared to the crammed agendas of weekend Swiss tournaments in the States. Also, Olympiads are energizing, and I was so keyed up that fatigue was inadmissible.

At the beginning of each round I took as many photos as possible, usually costing me ten or more minutes on my game clock. But lighting conditions were very favorable, and with such a galaxy of chess stars present, it was an opportunity to be seized. The processing facilities available were OK, so that by the end of the Olympiad I had many prints in hand. GM Yasser Seirawan bought 105 photos for his magazine *Inside Chess*, and GM Joel Benjamin took a lesser amount for possible use in his *Chess Chow*, although neither publication used photos to the extent that the slick-papered *Chess Life* did.

I also wanted to do some cemetery photography, so one day I got into a cab along with my 17-year-old teammate, Guerra, from St. Croix. We first visited an interesting Chinese burial ground which was surrounded by a high wall and an attended gate. Then we went to a Catholic cemetery which was completely open, with a major road running through it. We left our parked car, and Guerra and I along with the driver entered a maze of paths with thick vegetation interspersed with grave sites. Mostly there were simple stone markers, as usually seen in a poor country, but then we came upon an area of elaborate tombs, and I was stunned to find people living in them! Cooking fires, hanging laundry, and families just as surprised to see us as we them. I would have loved to take their photos, but decided this would be imprudent, and we continued along the paths, snapping occasional statuary until my film roll was finished.

On the way back to the taxi we came upon a secluded clearing, and there was a semi-circle of 12 to 14 men, each about two yards apart, facing us, clearly expecting us. Danger! Young Guerra told me later he was ready to run at their slightest move, and all I could do was clutch my camera bag tightly. Yet, surprisingly, they let us pass, and there was a reason. Going back to our hotel, the cab driver said that he only drove a taxi for extra money, he was actually a policeman. This would explain why those threatening men didn't touch us, but I wondered how they knew he was a policeman, since he just wore a white shirt and slacks. The driver told us his pants were part of his uniform, an easily recognizable shade of light brown. He added that he wore a gun under his shirt, and that the cemetery was a very dangerous place. The people living in the tombs were poor

country folk who came to Manila looking for work, and had no other place to find shelter.

We had been fortunate to have a driver who was a cop, and I decided to press my luck in one of Manila's casinos. The sign at the door gave me a start, saying 'Please check your gun'. Inside, most of the activity was in incomprehensible Asian games. I tried a little blackjack and left.

Later, through a Philippines-Virgin Islands connection, our team was invited to dinner in a wealthy home. The entire family were doctors, very gracious, but their house was in a high-walled guarded compound in which a burglary had taken place the previous week. And someone subsequently called my hotel room falsely representing himself as someone I knew, and wanting me to meet him down the street to lend him some money. An obvious con, but very skillfully tried. All of the above, in addition to the omnipresent poverty and an atmosphere which felt like warm soup, and you can see why Manila is not on my recommended list. The chess, though, was great.

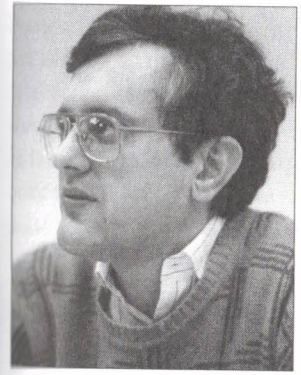
This was the first Olympiad in which the makeup of FIDE was affected by the break-up of the Soviet Union. There was no longer a single USSR team representing the vast territory of Asia and the Baltics. Instead, appearing in Manila were teams from Russia and about a dozen new republics, all of them with very strong players. So strong in fact that all three medal winners came from this landmass! Russia winning the gold was not surprising, but Uzbekistan and Armenia took the silver and bronze. Many westerners had barely heard of these places! The scores were Russia 39-17, Uzbekistan 35-21, and Armenia 34½-21½.

There was a momentous change in the women's Olympiad as well, aside from the addition of the new republics. Hungary, which had won the gold in 1988 and 1990, appeared in Manila without their power base, the immensely talented three Polgar sisters. They reportedly declined to come because of 'financial considerations'. And so the gold and silver medals were taken by two of the new republics, Georgia 30½-11½ and Ukraine 29-13. The bronze was won by China, a fast-developing chess power, 28½-13½.

There were 102 men's teams, and the Virgin Islands came in 97th place. I scored 7½-6½. Sixty-two women's teams participated.

Big news in Washington DC! On July 21, 1992 the US Chess Center came into being. It occupies the entire basement floor of a fine building in a good neighborhood, with a spacious street-level entrance. Most importantly, the chess facility has a FREE twenty year lease! This surprising feature came about because the city offered a tax incentive for new buildings that incorporated free community-oriented cultural facilities into their construction.

The timing was very important here, because just as the decision was being made as to whom should benefit from this largesse, an article appeared in the *Washington Post* which described the work being done among inner city school children by one David Mehler. The article described how Mr. Mehler, a criminal defense attorney, had for some time on his own initiative been teaching chess to deprived young students. The idea, of course, was to channel the kids away from the dubious activities endemic in their environment, while at the same time develop their minds. This project appealed to the powers that be, and Mehler was awarded the lease to provide a base for his humanitarian work.



David Mehler, doing good things for scholastic chess

Unlike the finished offices on the upper floors (which included a Swedish consulate), Mehler was presented with bare concrete walls, with the freedom to develop the area as he saw fit, but without the money to do so. So Dave had to go out fund-raising first, and as he was well known in the US chess scene as a player, tournament organizer and teacher, he was able to gather enough money to have builders finish about half of his allotted space, or enough to open for business.

It was gratifying for Washington area chess players to finally have a suitable home base, and I was particularly looking forward to regularly scheduled blitz tournaments. Dave initially set aside one night a week for this activity, but after about a year attendance dwindled. Then he tried telephone reminders on the day of the tournament, and this brought out the players for a while. Finally, beset by a heavy schedule, he asked me to ring up the local speedsters, much as I had done when blitzes were held at my house. This helped temporarily, and then some unknown donor offered $50 in prizes for each tournament. But finally, either the $50 incentives ran out, or else the

players en masse took cozy refuge in their respective burrows. Very disappointing. I suppose a reluctance to come into town from the suburbs was a factor, and Mike Atkins' club in nearby Virginia thrives on Friday nights.

In the meantime, Dave Mehler was very correctly following his mandate by guiding the center's major activities toward the area's inner city kids. He greatly increased the scope of chess instruction in the schools, and by 1998 he had four full-time and two part-time instructors working in 40% of DC schools! Additionally, on weekends the center is filled with enthusiastic kids playing in tournaments or receiving additional lessons. Summer chess camps are also part of Dave's schedule. Clearly he knows where his priorities lie, and he has largely given up his law practice. Perhaps because of his courtroom combativeness, Dave has on occasion alienated a few people, but in my view he is clearly doing fine things for US chess.

I had graduated from high school way back in 1943, and except for saving addresses of two friends, had drifted out of touch. Now, 50 years later, I was surprised to receive an invitation to a class reunion. It was to be held at the home of Jerry Kohlberg, whom our fellow students had voted the most likely to succeed. Wow! They certainly knew how to pick a winner! Jerry had risen quickly in the business world and his well-known firm of Kohlberg, Kravis, Roberts was the pioneer in leveraged buyouts.

After a five hour drive, Mimi and I arrived at Jerry's country estate, which featured a large home, outbuildings, a wooded area, lake, and rolling fields dotted with exotic varieties of sheep, and peacocks in the trees. The lawn party was already in progress, with a sumptuous buffet, and we soon found several of my closest friends of 1943. How weird it is to meet someone after 50 years of separation! We searched each other's faces, noting the obvious signs of deterioration and change, and yet the voices and mannerisms were almost the same, only slightly altered. And while we were once closely allied in our efforts to hit Frankie Wymb's curve ball, now differing life styles and political philosophies have irrevocably driven us apart. Still, the evocation of long-forgotten incidents and wistful memories made the reunion a strangely pleasurable experience, despite the harsh reminder of so many years gone by.

I came across Joan Ronder, one of our very brightest students, who had been one of only three who won a national science talent search in 1943. A handsome student with a fine singing voice ended up immersed in some branch of Christianity. One man at the reunion took pride in having had a single poem published. I spoke with Patsy Reid, whom I had never talked to while in high school. She had become a nurse, and we talked about our experiences with hospital life. As she turned to go she said 'Oh, you were so *cute!*'

On encountering our host I introduced myself and the conversation went something like this –'Jerry, I vividly remember your playing basketball on our high school team.' 'Yes, well, I was only a reserve...' 'It's too bad you never made anything out of it, but I suppose you found something else to do?' The well-known corporate magnate stuttered briefly, but then said 'I, I, I'm still looking!' and we laughed uproariously. Afterward, he thanked me for my 'kidding'.

On many of our trips to Atlantic City we stopped off to visit Mimi's sister Jean and her family in a tiny town about an hour's drive from the casinos. Jean's husband Bob taught criminology in California, and was home infrequently, but also living on the inactive farm was their daughter Meagan. In 1994 Meagan was twenty-four, a warm, affectionate, attractive young woman. The family had a darkroom, and Meagan would occasionally make handsome prints from my old chess photos. In June we received a call from an emotionally upset Jean, who had arrived home to find the door open and Meagan missing. The police came, and with the aid of a sniffer dog soon found Meagan's body in a wooded area not far from the house. She had been raped and murdered. Suspicion soon centered on a young man who lived across the road, and had been making unwelcome overtures to Meagan. He admitted the crime and some months later just before the trial date he hanged himself in his cell. Two lives lost, two families shattered.

The 1994 Olympiad was held in Moscow. This sounded good to us; weren't the Russians known to be a chess-loving people? But they chose to host the event in *December*! Br-rr! This was particularly inconvenient for many coming from tropical countries, as they had no cold weather clothing. A teammate from the BVI stopped off at our Maryland house en route, and we went off to pick up some winter gear. I didn't need too much, but poor Henry had to spend a lot of money.

Arriving at the Moscow airport, I found it oppressive rather than welcoming. The customs and immigration officials were heavy-handed; the Soviet era was over, but this characteristic seemed to be endemic to the country rather than just to a regime.

The site of the Olympiad was the massive Cosmos hotel, and our team was assigned to adequate rooms on the 25th floor. Each floor had its own concierge, a woman seated at a desk next to the elevators. They were quite helpful in myriad ways, but we had a distinct impression that keeping an eye on the guests was one of their major functions. In this regard, we noticed that the third floor had no elevator stop, and we were told that 'in times past' the KGB was stationed there, presumably monitoring the listening devices in various rooms.

Well, if the Soviets were indeed gone, what then was the current situation in 1994? After some days, we were told that the huge hotel was owned by

the Russian mafia! In corroboration of this hypothesis, I briefly visited the Cosmos' small casino and found it to be a flagrant rip-off. Also, there were reportedly 52 prostitutes assigned to the hotel, and several were usually lounging in the lobby. And this 69-year-old player was propositioned in an elevator! As to elevators, they often broke down, and my teammate Craig Vantilbury once had to climb ten floors.

In all Olympiads there is a need for many assistants to aid the organizers and players in countless ways, and in my experience these positions were invariably filled by bright-eyed chess enthusiasts, usually young, but not necessarily so. In Moscow, however, these functions were most noticeably carried out by muscular neatly-dressed young men who seemed not to know anything about chess. Their presence was most heavily felt where they directed traffic in and out of the main tournament room. Indeed, Grandmaster Smirin was forcibly removed when he failed to show his ID card. At one point I experimentally withheld my ID, and a young thug kept following me out into the lobby, where he no longer had any legitimate function to fulfill. Also, so many of the players were attacked by criminals in the streets of Moscow that the *New York Times* featured an article about it. One foreigner was even robbed *in a bank*!

The top matches were played on the stage of a large theatre and a few of the games could be followed on demonstration boards. But the vast majority of the players were in a crowded room from which the public was excluded! A terrible arrangement.

The twelve previous Olympiads I had played in were all delightful affairs, with the varied cultural characteristics of the host countries being manifested in interesting, pleasant ways. This was certainly not the case in Moscow! From my point of view Moscow was definitely not delightful, although the cultural characteristics I observed certainly were interesting, as well as deplorable.

A few lines back I mentioned Craig Vantilbury as my teammate. For many years Craig had represented the US Virgin Islands in Olympiads and many international tournaments. Despite the fact that he was clearly the USVI's best player, and that his family maintains residency there, Craig and two other strong players were somehow ejected from their team under obscure circumstances. So the British Virgin Islands took advantage of this unexpected occurrence and were happy to recruit him as our top board. Aside from being a close friend of mine, Craig also qualified by working in the BVI in both construction and music.

The US and British Virgin Islands are basically one island group; we can see three of the US islands from our porch. In the chess world, the political distinctions have been somewhat blurred; in years past I played with USVI

teams, and as recently as 1992 we sent a joint team to the Manila Olympiad when neither entity could find enough players who could afford the air fare. At any rate I found myself bunking at a tournament once again with Craig, and our delegate Carol Jarecki had to share a room with one of our male players, which prompted some waggish comments.

While in Moscow we visited Red Square, which contained the high-walled guarded Kremlin, and a major church which had no benches. Worshippers stood for three hours during the weekly services! Also, an outdoor market in which the cheerful vendors worked throughout the day in sub-zero temperatures. We found the Moscow chess club located in a small self-contained building; there were some historic photos and a small tournament going on.

The men's Olympiad had 124 teams, the women's 81. As usually happens, the host country is allowed to field a second team. Russia 1 was favored (even without Karpov) and they did indeed win the gold. But it was Russia's second team that caught everyone's attention. It was a selection of their youngest and brightest talents, headed by Morozevich, and they actually led the field at one point! The final scores were Russia 1 37½-18½, Bosnia-Herzegovina 35-21 and Russia 2 beating out England on tiebreak 34½-21½. As for the women, the Polgar sisters came this time, but Judit opted to play top board for the Hungarian men! Despite her absence, Hungary's women still managed to win the silver. Gold – Georgia, 32-10; silver – Hungary, 31-11 and bronze China (tiebreak over Romania), 27-15. The BVI came in 115th, Craig Vantilbury 9½-4½ on 1st board, I scored 10½-3½ on second.

At the Moscow Olympiad, as well several of the preceding ones, I had increased my photographic activity. The usual guidelines for photographers allowed full access to the players for the first 10 or 15 minutes of the round only. So I took full advantage of that and invariably started my games with a time disadvantage. If my game finished early, then I would try to sneak in some more shots before being chased from the playing area. Besides the Olympiads, I also tried to cover major tournaments in the USA, as well as some Latino events that I played in. My photos were usually accepted and as this is written I have been published in chess magazines in the US, Cuba, France, Sweden and the Netherlands, as well as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *Der Spiegel*.

In late 1994, however, my work was not so well known, so it was a wonderful surprise to receive an invitation to cover the quarter-final FIDE World Championship qualifying matches in India! Wonderful, yet saddening, because there was no way I could justify paying that expensive airfare within

our budget limitations. Aside from the photo assignment, India is a country that had always fascinated us, so not being able to go was doubly regrettable. Consoling myself with the small satisfaction of having been invited, I had put the matter out of my mind when at Christmas I received an envelope from Mimi which entitled me to two tickets to India! Wow!! My wonderful wife had carefully considered the matter and decided that this was much too good an opportunity to pass by. Yes, the airfares would be expensive, but room and board would be paid by our hosts, and there would be a little income from my photo work. From this point forward we were in an excited state of anticipation.

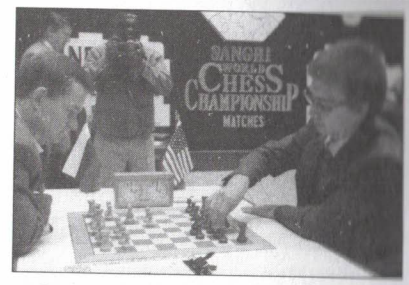
Our trip started off very badly, as our two suitcases were lost somewhere between Washington and Europe, never to be located. So we found ourselves trying to buy tropical clothing in Amsterdam in February! (We were able to fill out our wardrobe later in India, courtesy of KLM.)

After an overnight in Bombay (where an indefinable odor filled the air) we flew on to Hyderabad and were met by one of the chess organizers, who took us to an attractive compound where we would be staying. The Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology is a sort of think tank and research center and resembled a college campus. The facilities at Sanghi Nagar (where the matches would be held) were limited, and some of the journalists would have to be bused in from Hyderabad, 30 kilometers away. Those daily bus trips were revelations to our Western eyes; crowded streets, fascinating faces, beautiful saris, and ramshackle huts and stores.

Sanghi Nagar is a self-contained industrial complex, isolated in a dry hilly landscape, and run by wealthy Sri Ravi Sanghi, who was sponsoring the chess matches. Mr. Sanghi was convinced that India was destined to be a power in international chess, and was doing what he could to further that aim. He had constructed a special air-conditioned theatre for the matches with the players on stage behind a soundproof glass wall. There were small housing units for the players and analysts as well as some members of the press. Additionally, he was responsible for the creation of an attractive Hindu temple perched dramatically on a nearby hill, and his impressive home could be seen on another distant hill. Mimi later interviewed Mr. Sanghi, and her article subsequently appeared in *Inside Chess*.

The contending players in the two qualifying matches were Anatoly Karpov, paired against Boris Gelfand, and Valery Salov vs. Gata Kamsky. Young Kamsky, a Russian defector, was representing the USA, and was accompanied by GM analysts Alex Shabalov, Roman Dzindzichashvili and, most notably, Gata's father, Rustam. Rustam and his son had been granted political asylum some years back after the highly talented Gata, then 13, had played in a strong New York Open tournament. Since then Rustam, a burly

man in his forties, had gotten a reputation for aggressively protecting the rights of his son.



Karpov vs Gelfand **Salov vs Kamsky**
World Championship Qualifying Matches

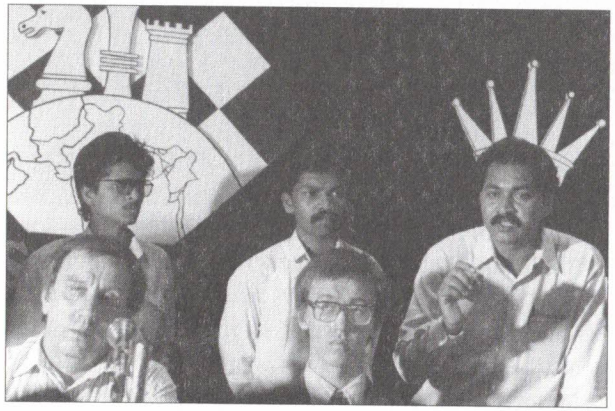
The opening night entertainment must have been quite typical for India, but to our eyes it was fascinatingly exotic. A very high official of the Andhra Pradesh state was present, and I retain a vivid picture of his fierce-looking bodyguard, eyes constantly searching the crowd, submachine gun at the ready.

The 10-game matches started the next day, and the rules stated that photographers were allowed on stage for only the first five minutes, but after that we could shoot at will through the glass wall, even sitting on the edge of the stage only a few feet from the players.

Kamsky got off to a good start, taking an early lead against Salov, while Gelfand was putting up more resistance to Karpov. With things going well for Gata, one could not have expected what followed. Their amiable analyst, GM Alex Shabalov, abruptly left Sanghi Nagar, and was seen to have a bruised face. What supposedly incurred the Kamsky wrath was Alex's 'consorting with the enemy', i.e. socializing with one of the other players in an idle moment. We had already heard a report that the Kamskys insisted upon a very taxing schedule of work with their two GM analysts, enough so as to prompt complaints to others. Then, with the matches perhaps 2/3 completed, the Kamskys called a news conference, in which Rustam complained that their host Ravi Sanghi had not yet paid them for their travel expenses, and perhaps also an agreed-upon appearance fee. He additionally complained that western-style cuisine was not available. (We had an excellent Indian chef.)

In essence, Rustam seemed to impugn the good intentions or reliability of Ravi Sanghi, whose company was in the Indian equivalent of the 'Fortune 500' in the USA. Throughout the news conference young Gata spoke very little, and his usual stony countenance gave no clue as to the degree of his support for what Rustam was saying. (Having seen Gata and photographed

him many times over the years, I can't remember ever once seeing a smile.) It later turned out that the cause of the payment's delay was the slow-moving Indian banking system!



The Kamsky news conference in Sanghi Nagar

On a rest day we were taken to the ruins of a historic fort called 'Golconda', which was on top of a steep hill. We all set out to climb up to it, but Mimi found she could not continue beyond the half-way point. One of the Indian journalists immediately volunteered to stay with her until we returned. We were most appreciative of this kind gesture, particularly since we had hardly even talked with the man before. His name is Anil Kumar, and later as we were leaving India we exchanged addresses, as one does on such occasions, with no real expectation of ever seeing him again.

Toward the end of the matches, Mimi and I skipped a round to see a bit of India. We flew to Bangalore, India's equivalent to the Silicon Valley, and then bused down to Mysore, seeing much of the lush countryside. We were really smitten with this extraordinary, vibrant nation.

Despite the earlier contentious interruption, Gata Kamsky managed to dispatch Salov without too much difficulty, and Gelfand succumbed to Karpov shortly afterward. Later, in Europe, Karpov would defeat Kamsky in their semi-final match.

For these grandmasters it was just another stop on their professional itinerant circuits, although Sanghi Nagar was a more important event than usual. For Mimi and me it was a wonderful travel experience, made even better for me by the admixture of chess and photography.

It was mentioned earlier that the matches in Sanghi Nagar were FIDE qualifiers. These eliminations led to the FIDE World Championships, as differentiated from the PCA world title. In March 1993 the strongest player in the world, Garry Kasparov, had broken with FIDE and then formed the Professional Chess Association. This improvised group would hold championship matches for far higher prizes than FIDE could muster; they were successfully financed because of Garry's obvious playing strength and fame. The schism, which sort of mimicked the chaos of professional boxing, was certainly regrettable, but like some journalists who took delighted advantage of the Kamsky controversy in India, I was very appreciative of the photo opportunities which Kasparov's actions made available to me. His 'group' organized a number of chess events in New York sponsored by Intel that brought many world-famous grandmasters to America, where big-time chess competitions had rarely been held. So for a few years I had photographic field days in the big city whenever an important competition was scheduled. It had all started in 1993 when Candidates' matches were held in the Trump Tower, a very fashionable building but a bizarre site for chess, as the players were cramped into the center of a large public atrium, where some fans watched the games from upper floors, and later matches were fought in small interior store fronts. But the organizers eventually got their act together, and subsequent rapid-play competitions were held in the spacious Javits Convention Center, with the addition of impressive high-tech viewing aids.

In 1995, Kasparov's flair for the dramatic reached its peak (literally!) when his World Championship match against Anand was held in the very top of the ill-fated World Trade Center. Mayor Giuliani made the ceremonial opening move and our perpetual BVI delegate, Carol Jarecki, had her most prestigious assignment ever as arbiter. Many chess luminaries came from far and wide for the event, and the *New York Times* gave it good coverage. It was the last time I saw Miguel Najdorf, who subsequently died.

As in Sanghi Nagar the players were in a soundproof glass enclosure, and move by move analysis was given in a small theatre next door. What with various side attractions, chess had taken over the entire floor, and as one walked the perimeter all of Manhattan island was in view to the north, and upon gazing downward tiny-looking boats were seen plying the rivers far below. A dramatic site for chess, but the mere theatricality of the match has now been overwhelmed by the horrible destruction of the buildings six years later. Events have forced a change in perspective, yet in 1995 the World Trade Center venue was considered a coup for Kasparov.

Garry certainly is a mover and shaker, yet his critics note that his actions for 'chess' generally turn out to be of great benefit to his pocketbook. They also feel that he wore the mantle of the World Champion with more arrogance than humility. His Indian opponent Viswanathan Anand, on the other

hand, generates admiration for his modest comportment as well as his chess skills, and he had many supporters at the match.

After a number of draws, Anand ('Vishy') scored the first win amid great excitement. His post-game interview in the ad-hoc press center was conducted with the graciousness one hopes for in a champion. But Kasparov quickly scored two victories and ultimately won the match, and it was business as usual again.

In 1995 I helped decorate the US Chess Center by mounting almost 300 of my Olympiad photos and posters upon the walls. They are on extended loan, as are photos of some leading local players. Shortly after, US Chess Federation historic artifacts were put on display in the center for a few years, before being sent to their ultimate destination in the Sidney Samole Chess Museum in Miami. And more recently, Dave Mehler has continued to upgrade the Chess Center by adding a small office and library to the facility.

Later in 1995 Hanon Russell, the collector of chess memorabilia and creator of an annual chess calendar, came to my house in Maryland along with Geurt Gijssen, the well-known chess arbiter. Russell wanted to see my photos with the likely aim of buying the collection. Mr. Gijssen inquired about rare chess books, but I had nothing of interest in that category. Russell looked at my score sheets of games against Bobby Fischer and Marcel Duchamp and thumbed through many of my as yet uncatalogued photos. He then offered a price for the entire collection, but even though I could have used the cash at that time it was not a worthy offer, in my estimation. Recently Russell sold his chess memorabilia, and is no longer an active collector.

In 1996 the Olympiad took place in Yerevan, Armenia, and the BVI made every possible effort to get at least the minimum four players to go, but for one reason or another my buddies were not interested in Armenia. And then of course reports came back that it had been one of the best Olympiads.

By the spring of 1997 Mimi and I had accumulated enough air travel miles to enable us to go to Europe, so we flew to Milan where I had a great time photographing the marvelous 'Cimitero Monumentale'. We then went by train to Venice, Lienz and Vienna, where I continued to photograph cemeteries, and we enjoyed fine music, art, food and sightseeing. Do the Europeans have a full appreciation of their great continent? Or perhaps we were just naïve, starry-eyed tourists. To our minds there is a wonderfully rich culture on the other side of the Atlantic.

For the second successive spring it was off to Europe, this time for a full month in southern France. Arriving in Nice, I was able to locate a good chess

club (not always an easy thing to do in a foreign city) and got in some blitz games. We went by train to Menton, Eze and Monaco, all beautiful. After winning a little money in Monte Carlo we rented a car and our stomachs had a great time exploring Provence. We always checked out casinos, and in one of the larger towns we found some progressive video poker machines which were not quite playable according to our usual standards, but we were in the mood to indulge, and it was close enough of a chance to justify trying our luck. After an hour or two Mimi hit a royal flush! We had won enough money to more than pay for the entire trip! And to top it all off, the cemetery in Marseilles was a gas.

August found us on Cooper Island with hurricane Georges approaching. Storms had hit Cooper glancing blows before, and we had lost two jetties, but not while we were there. This was to be our first direct experience with a hurricane. Our windows were mostly boarded up except for a few in the back of the house, furniture was brought in from the porch, loose items were put away, and our small boat was hauled up on the beach. Chris Tilling, the beach club manager, expressed concern about our being alone in the house during the storm, but we would feel secure behind our thick concrete walls. Our house has two separate wings, and we holed up in the section with the bathroom, kitchen and our bedroom.

The sky darkened, and both the wind and rain intensified by the minute. We watched with mounting excitement from our open porch as ever more violent waves crested against the shore below, completely obscuring our jetty. When things got too wild we retreated into the house and barricaded our kitchen door, which faced the sea.

After some hours, the screaming wind quieted down a bit, and we ventured out via a patio door. It seemed to be the relatively calm 'eye of the storm' but very quickly a strong gust of wind came up, knocking aside the piece of wood I had used for a prop, and the door slammed shut behind us. We had locked ourselves out, with the second violent part of the hurricane approaching fast!

Of course a good chess player knows how to deal with unexpected moves, and so we went to the north house wing to look for some sort of tool to pry open the patio door. Opening the other building with the key we had resourcefully left in the lock, I very carefully laid the key on a bed while we searched. Upon finding some implement that might work, we returned to the south wing where our efforts to gain entry did not succeed. And now the other door slammed shut and we were locked out of both wings! I suppose I have to admit to a slight inaccuracy, although it would be preferable to say that hurricane Georges was outplaying us!

With the howling wind and pelting rain again increasing, we made our way to a back window which was sheltered by the hill. We were able to remove the glass louvers and tear open the metal screen to gain entry into the house. In a somewhat unorthodox manner, we had castled out of danger!

When the hurricane finally moved on, what foliage remained on the hillsides had turned brown from the high-flying sea spray, and the smell of dead fish which had been hurled ashore pervaded the air. Our house had only one slightly damaged door, but the waves had knocked out a 5 by 7 foot section of our concrete jetty. This was the second storm that had done this, and we now replaced this vulnerable area with wooden planks. (Easier to knock out, but much less expensive to replace.) We were lucky; the main island of Tortola six miles away had sustained more severe damage.

The BVI missed our second straight Olympiad this year, but I wasn't too upset about it. Kalmykia would have been an ordeal, and expensive at that. Also it was questionable as to whether the construction of the 'Chess City' that FIDE president Kirsan Ilyumzhinov had constructed especially for the event, would be completed in time.

In October Mimi retired from her position in the Bureau of Economic Analysis, although continuing to work there for three more months as a consultant. Retirement is a big decision, taking a smaller income in exchange for more personal freedom is not easy, and the finality of having reached one of life's later stages is difficult to deal with. But Mimi was able to slip into a sort of semi-retirement by virtue of getting short-term training assignments in foreign countries. As one of the few available experts in an esoteric software program called 'Aremos', she gave instruction to central bank members in Barbados for two weeks in February 1999. In December of that year Mimi was sent to Zambia for four weeks. She loved that country; perhaps one reason was that she resided in a private game park. I chose to remain on Cooper Island to work on the beginnings of this memoir. Of course if Mimi had received an assignment to Paris or Rome I would have joined her in a millisecond!

To bring Mimi's travel assignments up to date, in February 2001 she taught members of a quasi-governmental organization in Saudi Arabia for four weeks! She found it a very interesting experience, but basically depressing. Required to wear the same abaya and head scarf as all women there, Mimi had to hold classes in her hotel, as there was no women's rest room in the large office building of the consortium! Of course renting the hotel venue added greatly to the expense which her hosts had to bear. Being lectured to by a woman was a strange situation for these men, and they were uncomfortable with the arrangement.

Back to chess. FIDE president Kirsan Ilyumzhinov decreed that the 1999 World Championship would be held in Las Vegas! You can imagine my excitement; an entire month of chess, scores of grandmasters to photograph, and all taking place in gamblers' heaven! Well before the tournament I sent a letter to FIDE executive director Emmanuel Omuku, accompanied by my best published chess photographs. I knew Emmanuel, and thought that the quality of my work might enable me to get free lodging for the event, as I had obtained for the matches in India. Dream on! On opening night Emmanuel said there were no funds available for that. So this ever resourceful chess player went to Plan B.

As frequent gamblers, Mimi and I were well known at many casinos, and could get free rooms and meals on the basis of our previous playing record. So we had made a listing of those places that would accommodate us gratis, found out which casinos would be holding tournaments or other special events which would increase our winning chances, drew up a schedule for the month of August and made reservations accordingly. So when Omuku said there were no free rooms available from FIDE, our fall-back plan was completely in place. One casino even paid for our cross-country air fares!

On the opening night at Caesar's Palace I felt a tingle of excitement when Mimi and I first caught sight of some of the gathering grandmasters. Of course by the end of the month grandmaster sighting would be old hat, because of the repetitive exposure. Still, the FIDE Championship was a very big chess event, I felt privileged to be there with my camera, and even the most experienced GMs probably had a quickening pulse.

The pro-forma welcoming speeches were not overly long and that was good, but the prepared entertainment was really bizarre, a jumble of well-intentioned misjudgments that were completely out of place in the sophisticated show biz world of Las Vegas. A fashion show of fur coats?? I doubt the GMs were enthralled.

The Championship consisted of a series of knock-out matches, so as a photographer I had to work very fast at the beginning as large numbers of players would be forced out in the first two rounds. By the third round I had photos of all the survivors up to that point, and could concentrate in a more relaxed mode on getting better shots. Photographers are never satisfied. By the end of the month I had over 700 photos! I was careless in choosing where to have my first roll developed, and the casino photo shop that catered to tourists did a terrible job. But things were OK after that.

In the meantime I was renewing social contacts with players, officials and visitors, some of whom I hadn't seen for years, and making new connections. Additionally, the press center became a pleasant place to hang out, and I played some blitz games with Campomanes, Ron Gross, and others. Ron

had been an habitué of the New York flea house club many years ago, and we enjoyed comparing notes on that scene. Ron lived in Las Vegas, and he kindly invited me to his comfortable house where he used his home court advantage to get improved results in our blitz games.

In the Championship, all of us were constantly speculating on the results, and in each match I would adopt one of the players to silently root for. For instance, I was hoping the Indian Barua would do well, because of our fond feelings for his country, based upon our 1995 visit there. But he lost a very difficult battle to Khalifman, and I went on to choose others to cheer for.

The talented young American Gata Kamsky, who had dropped out of chess to go to medical school, was playing, and people wondered how he would do after his absence from the game. I found him and his ever-present father out in the hallway, and upon raising my camera was waved off by Gata. Was this because of Rustam, and his well-known volatility? Gata himself was an enigma to me; in numerous encounters I had never detected a hint of his personality. Always dead-pan, never a smile. At any rate, he was knocked out in the second round. Khalifman, again!

Big name players were toppling everywhere. Kramnik, Shirov, Timman, Topalov, Kortchnoi, Gelfand, Ivanchuk, Short, Leko, all gone! None of the Americans got very far, and the young Russians Svidler, Sakaev, Rublevsky, Zviagintsev did little better. The heralded Ukrainian newcomer Ruslan Ponomariov lost also. Judit Polgar, my personal favorite to win the Championship, advanced by Nielsen, Magem and then Zviagintsev, but lost to Khalifman.

While all this was going on Mimi and I were fighting our own battles. We were getting free rooms and meals from various casinos for two to four days each, but I then felt obligated to do some gambling in return for our complimentaries, as is the custom. I started off well in our four days at the MGM Grand, winning a modest prize in a tournament, but then lost some of that at the slot machines. There were more free tournaments with big prizes at the Mirage, Treasure Island and Harrah's, but I failed to come in the money. Aside from the tournaments, I played some video poker in each casino without fruitful results. About this time I became aware of a flaw in my finely constructed Plan B, namely that I might *lose*! What a rude awakening! At any rate, as the month wore on I found myself defending a gradually diminishing gambling fund, and the luxury rooms and food seemed not quite enough compensation.

After the first two or three rounds there were quite a few knocked-out grandmasters at loose ends. (At least one of them quickly lost his sizable prize money in the casinos!) By fortune's good graces (or perhaps clever planning) one of the major American tournaments, the annual US Open, was being held this same month in Reno, at the other end of Nevada. And

the timing was such that those eliminated early from the FIDE matches had ample opportunity to travel north to enter the Reno tournament. So with so many foreign players available in the area, the already strong US Open would be even more interesting. Actually, with our cross-country air fare having been paid by Harrah's Lake Tahoe casino, Mimi and I already had a reservation nearby, timed for the last three rounds of the US Open. (The FIDE Championship was then in the semifinal stage, with four-game matches scheduled for England's Mickey Adams vs. Armenian Vladimir Akopian, and Russian Alexander Khalifman vs. Romanian Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu, followed by two days off before the final.)

We rented a car and for three days took the 15-mile scenic drive into Reno in time for the photo shoot at the beginning of each round. While there I exchanged words with Walter Browne and Larry Evans whom I knew well, from the old flea house days in New York. Walter, to whom I was showing photos for his magazine 'Blitz Chess', was playing in the tournament, while Larry was there to give lectures. It's difficult to be certain but this may have been the last time I saw GMs Edmar Mednis and Eduard Gufeld, both of whom would die within a few years. Edmar and I had once played a game in New York's Met League, and all that I remembered is that it was a French Defense and that I had lost. More than 20 *years later* we met somewhere and he started quickly rattling off the moves of that game, and I'm sure he could have continued doing that until my resignation. Edmar didn't intend it, but this was a compelling demonstration of the vast difference between the memory of grandmasters and the low-grade masters. As for Gufeld, I saw him involved in a loud dispute, something that he was known for.

Back at Harrah's Mimi and I played their liberal slot machines without success, and found some time to explore beautiful Lake Tahoe, including a boat cruise.

Yermolinsky won the US Open, and of those foreign players who made the trip from Las Vegas to Reno, only the Latvian Rozentalis was able to tie for second, with four US residents.

When we got back to Las Vegas we learned that Khalifman and Akopian would meet in the six-game final, having defeated Nisipeanu and Adams, respectively. I was sorry to see Mickey Adams go down, as he had always been quite pleasant to me. I had photographed Akopian at a number of open tournaments in the US, and he was not too communicative, perhaps because of English-language difficulties.

Nisipeanu was completely unknown to me before this tournament. He seemed a personable, clean-cut young man. Khalifman acquitted his post-game interviews graciously, relaxing with a beer or cigar as he did so. He had been a strong player for many years, but considering the powerful field that started, his

reaching the final was a big surprise. (His opening odds were 25 to 1.) As a matter of fact, among the four players of the semi-final round, only Mickey Adams had the rating credentials to belong there. The other remaining contenders were such underdogs that Garry Kasparov contemptuously referred to them as 'a bunch of tourists!' Of course Garry had his own world title, and disparaging the FIDE Championship in any way came naturally to him.

Throughout the matches it was observed that Khalifman had a frequent habit of walking around, hands clasped behind him, when it was his opponent's move. This became so noticeable that people would say 'Khalifman's doing THE WALK.'

This maneuver perhaps served to relieve Alexander's tension, although one wonders how many variations were racing through his mind at the time! Khalifman continued his WALK throughout the final match, which had been moved to a dramatically raised platform in a small theater.

Akopian never changed expression while playing, presenting a countenance of serious concentration at all times. Perhaps he was emulating his Armenian compatriot Smbat Lputian, who is the supreme champion of all stone faces.

In assessing the two finalists I tried to gauge which would be the more desirable champion, in the context of being best for the propagation of chess, and Khalifman's communication skills carried the day. Just as well, for Alexander triumphed, and his short victory speech was most appropriately rendered. Congratulations Alexander! I trust that your prize money was adequate to lessen the blow of being called a 'tourist'.

As for Mimi and me, the jackpots which I pursued daily proved too elusive, and our losses for this adventurous month were about equivalent to having had to pay for our hotel rooms. Would I do it again? Yes!

November found us on Cooper Island with our second hurricane bearing down upon us. The storm was called Lenny, and was very unusual in that it was occurring well past the normal hurricane season, and coming from the southwest instead of the east. This time we cleverly avoided locking ourselves out, and it was sort of fun tracking the storm on our computer. When the eye of the storm was directly over us, our solar electricity was functioning perfectly, while all of the power on the main island of Tortola had been turned off for many hours as a precaution. But this time we sustained considerable damage to our concrete roadway at the base of our hill; the heavy seas had torn it to pieces. Beyond that, it was more dead fish and browned foliage.

In February 2000 I had been playing for some hours in a Florida casino when a strong wave of disparate symptoms overwhelmed me. Weakness, extreme uneasiness, chest discomfort. The effects were so pronounced that I

was compelled to stop playing, which one should *never* do while pursuing a large jackpot. I went to a nearby hospital, saw a doctor who wanted to admit me, but left as my symptoms had largely disappeared. Later, my cardiologist referred to it as a heart 'incident', and suggested that I consider some aggressive treatment. But at the tender age of 75 I had not yet developed a sense of possible mortality, so I demurred.

In May, the daughter of my only cousin Joy was getting married, and Mimi and I were invited. Elizabeth and Sean had developed a very successful business which they had just sold, and so they decided to splurge and get married at Disney World. Back in Florida we enjoyed a very lavish reception on the eve of the wedding, and among the notables attending were Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy! Upon arriving at our hotel room around 1 a.m. I experienced another 'incident', and an ambulance was called. This time I spent the rest of the night in a hospital bed. In the morning the symptoms had dissipated, and as that was the wedding day for my relative, I signed out of the hospital over the doctors' protests. The marriage ceremony was held in a lakeside chapel on Disney World property, and the following morning there was a brunch attended by Alice and the Mad Hatter. I have hardly any living relatives, and it was good to share in the festivities.

When we returned to Maryland there was a big problem awaiting me, as explained by my cardiologist. Having experienced two major heart incidents within a few months, my remaining options were narrower than my arteries. After some examinations, a bypass operation was scheduled.

It could be said that I'd brought this crisis upon myself. The heart attack in 1989 should have been all the warning that was necessary, and a disciplined diet and healthful living could have averted my current problem. But without overt alarming symptoms it was easy to slip back into my normally self-indulgent life style, and the penalty for having done so was now due.

The Washington Hospital Center has an excellent reputation for its heart surgery, and bypass operations have become quite a routine procedure, but when you are the one to go under the knife it is impossible to be casual about it. As it was, the normal three day hospital stay stretched into a full week for me, and after two shaky days at home, breathing problems developed and it was back into the hospital for another week. A very slow recovery, but after two months my health was better than it had been for several years.

The fall of 2000 was Olympiad time again, this time in Turkey. But there had been a terrible earthquake the previous year quite near Istanbul, and that seems to have been a factor in squelching any move to organize a BVI team. This was the third straight Olympiad we had missed, and I was very unhappy about that.

For some years we had been users of the Sprint telephone system, and they had an arrangement whereby customers accumulated credits for their usage of the system which could then be redeemed for prizes. In mid-2001 we saw that we had qualified for Sprint's largest award, two free round-trip plane tickets to India! Wow! Since we had fallen in love with that country during the matches at Sanghi Nagar in 1995, all that remained was to plan our trip.

We had a few addresses from that earlier trip, and since we were particularly interested in Kerala province, we wrote to someone who lived there, asking for some advice on what to see. Anil Kumar had been the fellow who volunteered to stay behind with Mimi when a group of us was climbing a steep hill to see an ancient ruin. It was a very kind act, the more so as we did not even know the man. Anil was one of many chess journalists in attendance at Sanghi Nagar, but we had had no contact with him since then.

Now he sent us a very warm response to our letter, saying that he would take off from his work (teaching English literature) and drive us around Kerala. We were much heartened by this, and scheduled our trip for October-November after Mimi's projected consulting stint in Egypt.

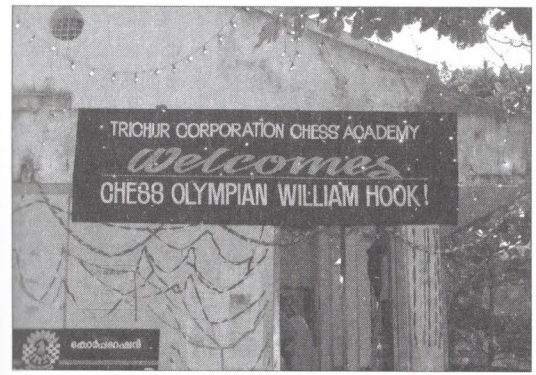
Then, on September 11, the destruction of the World Trade Center changed our perspectives on a lot of things. Mimi thought it prudent to cancel her Egypt job, and we were wondering about India as well. Anil assured us that India's millions of Muslims would not be a threat to American travelers, but we were concerned. In the end we went, just a month after September 11. We started with a week in Paris, but had the bad luck to be there when all the museums were closed for a strike. Despite my efforts, no chess club could be found, so we had to be content with eating and walking around. No great hardship there!

We were met in New Delhi by a member of TCI, (Travel Corporation of India), a tourist service. At our age, and in a markedly different society, we thought it best to have some professional guidance. We were taken to a 5-star hotel, a very comforting way to enter India. Down the hall an armed soldier guarded a door, and we later learned that the Dalai Lama was staying there.

Next morning we flew south to Cochin, and were given a warm welcome by Anil. He took us to his house where his lovely wife Jayasree had prepared a tasty lunch. Then Anil quickly bundled us into his van along with his children Appu and Oshin, as he wanted us to see a major festival in Mysore, a long drive away. An unavoidable detour forced us to find potluck accommodation at a late hour. After the 5-star first night, our second hotel cost us two dollars! I can only say that both rooms were worth the price! After this Anil made sure to guide us to more comfortable lodgings, which at our age we certainly appreciated. The festival parade in Mysore and the brilliantly lit palace were dazzling, and on the way back we slept in a game park, complete

with unusual night noises. In the morning we had a 1½ hour elephant ride in the jungle. To feel the power of this animal beneath you is a very odd experience, and with our legs dangling over the side we became quite nervous whenever the elephant passed disconcertingly close to a tree, as we visualized our crushed limbs. There were monkeys, peacocks and deer to see, and later scenic mountains and tea plantations.

Kerala province has a large network of inland waterways, and we chartered a quaint houseboat for two days, which we shared with Anil and his wife, and their friend. Kunjettan was about 53 years old at the time, and it was a delight to be with him. At the age of six he contracted polio, and ever since then he has had shriveled legs, so that he has to propel himself about by his strong arms. One would expect that situation to result in a bitter, morose character, but Kunjettan is surprisingly joyous, and lifts the spirits of those around him. He is probably about a class A chess player, and we played some blitz games before I took on Anil. Anil had played for the Indian team in the 1982 Olympiad, and currently has the title of International Correspondence Master. Once he had determined how well I played, Anil asked if I would give a simultaneous exhibition at his club, which is just a block from his house. Very few foreign chess players find their way to his city of Trichur, and I suppose my Olympiad gold medal was noteworthy enough to serve as an attraction. At any rate, I was very pleased to accept his invitation, but at the age of 76 just seven boards were all that was manageable. When we approached the club a few days later I was surprised to see a huge painted sign which said 'Welcome Olympian William Hook' and was decorated with colorful streamers.



A very kind gesture

Inside, the mayor of Trichur greeted me, and there was an audience of about 60 people. Television cameras ground away as I gave an impromptu speech,

and there was an audible gasp when I said my BVI country had a population of 20,000. (Trichur's population is over 100,000). In the simultaneous, my legs were wobbly after an hour or so, and I had to carry a chair around with me for the remaining games. I won six, and lost to a 14-year-old boy who had come in second in that age category for India. We watched me on a brief television news feature that evening, which was broadcast in the Malayalam language.

During the next few days we started receiving phone calls in our hotel room from a 'chess fan' who insisted on making an arrangement to meet me privately. That he stipulated a private meeting made me fearfully suspicious, and since this was less than two months after the September 11 terrorist attack, I thought that among the more than 100 million Muslims in India, there were probably a few extremists who would relish getting their hands on an American. One of these calls awoke us at 2:15 a.m.! Anil somehow got in touch with the person and managed to discourage any further calls, but shortly before leaving Trichur the following astounding fax arrived.

TO: WILLLIAM HOOK
ENGLAND
FROM: XXXXX Trichur
INDIA 05-11-2001

Oh! William Hook,
Please accept my reverence Oh, great Olympiad gold and silver medallist, who have also adorned the much coveted Olympiad Chess Chairs 13 times, and could I have the honour of being your pen friend? How would you assess the long 7 decades that you spent among the 64 squares of the Chess board, Oh!! Chess master? Would you please keep your vast experience open before me? What would you say about – sorry for encroaching your personal life – about your sweet heart who has been a great inspiration to you at present?
Among the tens of billions of men who have lived and perished here on this earth only a few here and few there like you leave traces of their great existence for the posterity. Just imagine, the joy of a poor person like me would have when I happen to hear that one of the most renowned brains on this earth has shown me the generosity to become his pen-friend! A burning desire had been growing in me for quite some time, and that is why I was determined to contact you on the line . . . I am a 19 year old student . . . and XXXXX is my name. The only knowledge in Chess I have is getting defeated in that game by my friends whenever I play . . . etc.

I have to admit being a bit of a chess groupie myself when it comes to grandmasters, but is this what it is like to be on the receiving end? The message was a great relief in one way, it dispelled my fears that a terrorist was after me – better a fan than a fanatic!

To break the chronology for a moment – in early 2002 I received an email from Argentina from someone who describes himself as a 'William Hook fan'! An accompanying attachment shows a brave attempt to summarize my entire tournament record, going back to 1965 and including events that have long ago escaped from my memory. I am both appreciative and dumbfounded. My pedestrian chess results don't seem to justify such involved research, and I can only wonder why someone undertook the effort. Thanks, anyway!

Back to India... After two wonderful weeks in Kerala thanks to Anil, we headed north for our final week in Rajasthan. Considering that our passage to India was free, we had decided that we were justified in splurging on a seven-day trip on a train called the 'Palace on Wheels'. It was a *fabulous* journey. To begin with, the normal complement of passengers was 125, but because of the fears generated by the events of September 11, only 23 of us came, which resulted in very attentive service. The train traveled at night, and each morning buses would take us to a wonderful variety of sights; old forts, palaces, gardens, maharajah's homes, etc. In a game park we were fortunate to get a close look at a tiger, as well as the Kingfisher bird which hovers like a helicopter for long periods and then dives when it sees a fish. There was a town on the ancient silk road which still had open sewers, and then the incomparable Taj Mahal. Tensions were very high between India and Pakistan at the time, and we saw military trains mounted with huge cannons heading for the nearby border; the juxtaposition of pampered tourists with soldiers bound for a very possible war was incongruous, to say the least. Overall, India gave us unforgettable memories.

The 35th Olympiad took place in Bled, Slovenia, and after missing three successive events the BVI was finally able to organize a team for this one. As it was, we had only the minimum allowable number of players, four, which meant that each of us would have to play every round. But on the very bright side, Mimi was to be our team captain. It would be her first Olympiad, and I was very pleased to share this experience with her.

We flew to Munich a week early in order to rent a car and see Neuschwanstein castle and some of the Austrian Alps, ending up in Vienna for an opera, some blitz and good eating. On the train to Slovenia we met Hilton Bennett, the personable captain of the New Zealand team. It was

night when we arrived at the tiny station of Jesinice, with just a few dark houses in view. Fortunately the only other passenger who left the train perceived our plight, and he used a pay phone to call a taxi for us. Bled was just a few miles away.

On the Olympiad application form all teams were ostensibly given a choice of hotels, but as usual the more important countries were given the best accommodations. Our choice had been the top-grade Toplice Hotel, but we were quite fortunate to be assigned to a lower-grade annex to the Toplice, fortunate because our food was prepared in the same kitchen. And when we awoke the next morning, there could be no possible complaint for spending 17 days in the beautiful town before us.

Bled's population is a mere 5,000, but with both winter and summer tourism, there were many hotels. The town is centered around a beautiful lake with a small castle perched dramatically atop a sheer cliff, and there is an island with a church and restaurant on it. The four kilometer walk around the lake's perimeter was a big attraction to many of the players, and surrounding everything are snow-capped mountains. With the fine weather we were blessed with, good food and friendly people, this had the makings of a wonderful Olympiad, and that's just what it turned out to be.

One hundred and thirty-four men's teams were there, and eighty-nine women's teams. But of course the very strong Judit Polgar again played with the Hungarian men, on second board behind Peter Leko. The spacious playing hall was bedecked with the flags of all our nations, smoking was not permitted, and we all had players, press or officials badges to facilitate easy entry past security. With my photographer's badge I had access to the well-planned press center nearby with its ample supply of computers and knowledgeable people to answer our questions. Over 400 press members were covering the event!

Having missed the previous three Olympiads, I now found that some of my old friends were no longer present, and there were many new faces appearing. At the age of 77, I was the oldest participant, and one of the few advantages of longevity is a more vivid realization that the cast of characters is always changing, in Olympiads as in *real* life. GM Jonathan Speelman said he had referred to me in his chess column as the 'father of the Olympiad', and as I approached GM Peter Svidler he said 'Ah! here comes the legend!' The thing is, apart from a slight slowing down and more tentative body movements, I don't *feel* old. But this must be a very realistic film I'm in, because the people around me are gradually adding wrinkles and losing hair!

The BVI's first board was Craig Vantilbury, as he had been in Moscow '94. After me there was Henry Pickering (a veteran) and then 27-year-old Art

Christopher, playing for the first time. Wonderful teammates, and along with Mimi we had great spirit at mealtimes.

After dinner Craig and I would usually analyze our less experienced team members' games, and chess players back in the BVI were able to examine our games each day on their computers. Craig started well, defeating Australia's GM Darryl Johansen in a sparkling game, and then he barely lost to GM Kotronias of Cyprus. He went on to score a fine 10 points out of a possible 13, while too many draws held me to 8½-4½. There was great excitement among us when Art won his first Olympiad game ever. Poor Henry was beset with a nagging cough, and wasn't at his best. We only finished 127th out of 135, but we were happy just to be there in Bled.

Among the big boys, the Russians looked very strong, with Kasparov, Grischuk, Khalifman, Morozevich, Svidler and Rublevsky. And the only time they were threatened was in the ninth round, when the talented Hungarians upset them, 2½ to 1½. This cut the Russians' lead to just half a point, but they managed to hold off the Magyars for several more rounds and insured their triumph with an apparently arranged drawn match with Yugoslavia on the final day. Young Peter Acs played very well for the second-place Hungarians, and Armenia closed strongly behind Vladimir Akopian and Smbat Lputian to win the bronze medal. The gold medal for highest percentage score on first board was won by Robert Gwaze of Zimbabwe with an astounding 9-0 score, albeit against weak opposition, but this time there was also an award for the best performance rating and this was appropriately won by Garry Kasparov, who scored 7½ out of 9 against grandmaster opponents.

The dismal performance of the US team (41st place!) was something of a mystery. For many years the US was a consistent contender for the top medals, until the Istanbul Olympiad in 2000 (23rd place), and now Bled. This team was composed of six strong grandmasters who had played well for the US in the past, but only Yasser Seirawan had an outstanding score. Perhaps the answer for the future lies in the development of strong younger players, and Hikaru Nakamura and Varuzhan Akobian come to mind as possibilities.

In the women's Olympiad, Georgia underwent a severe collapse in the last few rounds to miss out on a medal after having been a 2½-point leader after ten rounds. China won their third straight Olympiad gold medal, rallying behind the 11-1 score of 17-year-old Zhao Xue. Russia was just a half point behind, due mostly to the 11-1 score of 16-year-old Tatiana Kosintseva. With these kids scoring so phenomenally, it appears that chess is fast becom-

ing a young person's game. Poland sneaked in for the bronze medal, edging out the veteran Georgian team.

During the 17 days in Bled our lives developed a very pleasant rhythm of lakeside walks, visiting churches and the castle, exploring other restaurants, and on free days visiting Ljubljana and the Adriatic coast. Among 14, this was my favorite Olympiad.

In March of 2003 Mimi and I did some serious thinking about things and made a major decision – to sell our Cooper Island home. After 42 years the thought of leaving is traumatic; we *LOVED* this place. But consider – I was 77 and Mimi 69, and the physical demands of living on Cooper were gradually becoming difficult for us. With advanced age comes increased vulnerability, especially if there is no prompt access to medical care. Also, it had been a lifelong dream of ours to do some extended traveling, but we couldn't afford to take the trips we had in mind and maintain two homes as well. It's almost shameful to have such choices to make considering the desperate plights of the world's poor, but we have been very fortunate to arrive at this situation in our maturity and now we'll play our hand as logically as we can.

Chess in the BVI looms large in my mind these days. There are great memories of the Thursday night sessions on Tortola, the chess picnics at our house, and the many Olympiad trips, all with a wonderful bunch of guys. Although we've sold the house I hope to come down here often, and perhaps get to a few more Olympiads.

One of many chess picnics at our house

I do regret not having been able to teach chess to some of the Tortola kids, but living out on the cay without an adequate boat made it unworkable.

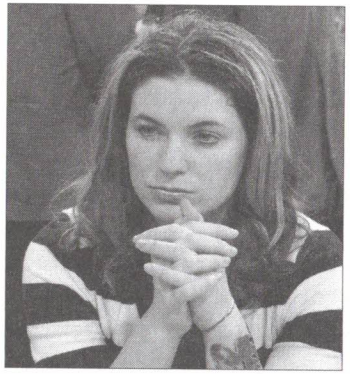
Now at this time Kenneth Christopher, one of our Olympiad players, has been taking some tentative steps toward exposing young students to the game, and apparently school officials have been somewhat cooperative. A dedicated, qualified instructor is sorely needed but it is unclear whether funds could be made available to pay him; perhaps FIDE, the local government or even the British Commonwealth authorities might be induced to sponsor someone.

Another possibility is for a suitably talented player to come take up residency on his own and do whatever teaching can be arranged, perhaps in addition to other employment. This altruistic approach is actually not entirely selfless, as it carries with it the benefits of playing in Olympiads, Zonals and other international tournaments! To any enthusiastic chess player who is not quite strong enough to obtain tournament invitations on his own, this could be an irresistible attraction. I sort of stumbled into the BVI chess scene and ended up going to 28 tournaments in 23 foreign countries, not at all bad for a 2200 player! A similar opportunity theoretically exists in the US Virgin Islands, but in recent years the federation there has excluded its strongest players from the Olympiads, a rather strange tactic which contradicts the FIDE ideal of having each country represented by its best possible team.

It is necessary for foreign nationals in the BVI to obtain work permits, which can easily be gotten if the immigrant has a skill which is in short supply here. Of course a chess master who can teach would not deprive a BVI citizen of a job, as there are no masters here.

Aside from the opportunities for international chess, living in the BVI is quite pleasurable; a great climate, water sports, good restaurants and supermarkets, and the US dollar is the official currency.

When we heard that the next Olympiad would be held in Mallorca, one of the Spanish Balearic Islands, Mimi and I looked forward to it with great anticipation. After all, we had lived in Ibiza, another of the islands, for a full year just after our marriage in 1957, and loved it. But that was oh so long ago. We have changed and things have changed. News of Ibiza's discos and mosh pits had filtered through to us, but we were still optimistic about Mallorca, a larger, beautiful island. We were anxious to renew our love for Spanish food and culture, and a week in Barcelona had whetted our appetite. While in that vibrant city, I managed to find the major chess club, interrupting a class of 20 students, and then playing some blitz with a group of friendly young men. When I showed them a collection of my chess photos, they looked long and wistfully at a picture of Jennifer Shahade, while commenting upon her beauty.



Former US Women's Champion Jennifer Shahade, 2002

On Mallorca, the Olympiad site of Calvia where the chess players were housed in various hotels proved to be a cheap British tourist enclave, with nary a sight of Spanish life. Practically all of the restaurants advertised 'Fish and Chips' or 'Bangers and Mash', etc., and the shops all sold T-shirts or other tourist junk. We had a very frank Majorca guide book which said that Calvia was inundated with English 'lager louts' and indeed we heard much carousing in the streets at night.

The games themselves were held in a small countryside casino, much too tiny to accommodate players, officials and press, while spectators had no satisfactory viewing possibilities. It was a shame that the Olympiad was not held in nearby Palma, which is a very attractive city. Undoubtedly insufficient funding had precluded that option. As it was, the only opportunities to visit Palma were on the two rest days. Of course the era of three rest days and gifts of spending money is long gone, but what could have been going through the organizers' minds when they put the second rest day *after* the final round? With the very arduous schedule behind us, what was there left to rest up for?

The one thing the organizers seemed to have gotten right was the necessary security arrangements. The inspectors were professional, courteous, and moved us inside as quickly as possible. But even this was spoiled by a scandalous incident at the closing ceremony. While the finger of blame could be pointed in several directions, and the security forces' behavior was reactive rather than instigative, still they must be condemned for imprisoning a FIDE vice president for two days, and severely beating him.

This deplorable episode came about when an award named for a former Women's World Champion was not announced as scheduled. (Organizers' fault?) FIDE vice president Zurab Azmaiparashvili, as a fellow countryman of the Champion, felt this was a serious omission and attempted to go on stage to inform the officials there about it. This was a reasonable action for a FIDE vice president to take but the security people had no way to discern the difference

between a vice president and a disgruntled crank, so they resisted Azmai's efforts. There was no apparent liaison between chess people and security people. (Organizers' fault?) Azmaiparashvili continued his efforts to get on stage, (Azmai's fault?) and security more vigorously rebuffed his advances. Frustrated, Azmai made an all-out stage assault resulting in a collision of heads, and three security men then threw him to the floor and arrested him. (Azmai's fault or security's fault, take your pick.) All this while, the very highest FIDE officials and top organizers were seated on stage witnessing Azmai's plight and doing NOTHING. (FIDE's fault and organizers' fault.)

After two nights in jail, photos of Azmai showed a very black eye and neck injuries. (Security's inexcusable fault.) All in all a disgraceful affair, with various parties sharing culpability in one way or another.

Digressive events aside, there was indeed a lot of chess played in Calvia, and the most dramatic result was clearly the failure of Russia to win the gold medal. First the Soviets, and then the Russians have beaten the rest of the world in every Olympiad since 1978, an astonishing winning streak. This time, however, they not only failed to win, but they finished a full three points behind an inspired Ukrainian team. It's true that the Russians were missing their best players, Kasparov and Kramnik, but Ukraine fielded a lineup with an average rating of 2654, clearly capable of beating anyone. And they improved on their expectation by having a team performance rating of 2762, led by 12-year-old Sergey Karjakin at 2929, the Olympiad's best achievement!

Calvia also saw Vishy Anand playing once again for India after an absence of five Olympiads, and his 2824 performance rating brought his country to sixth place in the standings. English GM Mickey Adams scored 10 out of 13 games on first board, but his fine efforts failed to prevent his country from slipping down to 30th place, a very disappointing result for this perennial chess power. This was reminiscent of the USA's downslide in the previous two Olympiads, but in Calvia they came in fourth, a terrific rebound from their 43rd ranking in Bled. (Chess is a mysterious game!) The very young Magnus Carlsen, on first board for Norway, attracted a lot of media attention. And somehow Bulgarian GM Evgeny Ermenkov was found playing top board for a very weak Palestinian team, a situation which facilitated his winning of a gold medal for highest percentage score. At one point all Olympiad players under 16 were gathered for a group photo, and it appeared there were 25 or 30 of them! At 79, it seems certain that I was once again the oldest, and so a group photo of those in my age category really wouldn't work.

On second board for the British Virgin Islands I scored 8-6 while Craig Vantilbury on first had a fine 9½-4½. The BVI were seeded 121st out of 129 teams and we finished 118th. Among the big boys, it was Ukraine 39½-16½, Russia (second on tiebreak) 36½, Armenia 36½, USA 35, and Israel 34½.

There were 87 teams in the women's section and China easily won their fourth consecutive gold medal(!) by three points, 31-11. Then came the USA with 28, Russia winning the tiebreak over Georgia at 27½, and France was fifth with 25½. The triumph of powerhouse China, led by former World Champion Xie Jun, was expected. The silver won by the USA was the first women's medal ever for that country! The story behind this performance was that about 18 months before Calvia the US Chess Federation had decided to make an all-out effort on behalf of their women's team. First they coaxed former World Champion Susan Polgar out of her semi-retirement from tournament chess, and then they obtained sponsorship from the Kasparov chess foundation. There followed many months of intensive training guided by Kasparov himself as well as a number of grandmasters of Soviet origin. With some fine talent to begin with, this resulted in the strong and enthusiastic team of Susan Polgar, Irina Krush, Anna Zatonskih and Jennifer Shahade. A force to be reckoned with in future Olympiads!

My overall reaction to Calvia? From the perspective of 14 prior Olympiads, this one was very disappointing. Undoubtedly the Mallorcans were heroic in even attempting such a massive project, stepping in after the original Minorcan organizers defaulted, but it was clear that they fell well short of adequate funding. Locating the event in a low-grade British tourist enclave was a blunder. Spain is a wonderful country with a cuisine and culture to be justifiably proud of, but we were unable to experience any of this where we were. The chess, as always, was great.

Starting in November of 2000 we extended our stays on Cooper Island to six months each year, taking advantage of Mimi's retirement and our natural inclination. We always had a much stronger sense of identification with the BVI community than with our Maryland environs: Silver Spring was simply too amorphous, while we had many close friends in the BVI.

These longer stays were very enjoyable, but as previously mentioned our declining physical capabilities had forced us to put our house on the market in 2003. Then in February 2004 came a bid from a seriously interested buyer, and the sale was consummated in March 2005. The price was mutually agreeable, with the wonderful proviso that we would have use of the house for one month a year for five years! Also, we liked the new owners and we deemed them to be good for Cooper Island. Indeed, they have already made attractive additions to the property as of February 2007 that would not have been affordable for us.

An interesting sidelight is that the house sale only came about because of a chance encounter of two strangers in a Colorado office, one of whom was wearing a Cooper Island T-shirt. Again, apropos of previous speculations in

this narrative, was it truly a 'chance' encounter, or was there a 'design' factor at work? I shouldn't get hung up on this sort of conundrum, but perhaps my games mentality should be blamed.

Upon hearing that the 2006 Olympiad would be in Torino, Italy, we became very excited, and our anticipation even increased when watching the Winter Olympic Games with its spectacular opening and closing ceremonies, and knowing that we would have the same accommodations as the winter athletes had.

We flew to Naples and then trained to Rome, and I had good photo shoots in both of their major cemeteries, in addition to the usual sightseeing rounds. On to Livorno for three days at the home of our good friends, Stuart and Sylvia Wagman.

Upon arrival at the huge Olympic Village complex in Torino we found that our accommodations had been stripped of amenities such as TV's, fridges, and laundry machines, which had been recently available for the Winter Games athletes. It was about a ¼-mile walk to the dining buffet, and about a mile to the playing hall, mostly on a bridge over a railroad yard. The buffet initially had long lines, and the food served was poor. That was a real shock for us, considering that we were in Italy! Mimi was our team captain again, and after comparing notes with other teams she took the initiative and organized a captains' meeting to protest conditions. Since we all had similar grievances, the meeting was very well attended, and actually resulted in a marked improvement of our situation. I was quite proud of my wife for her action.

The opening ceremony, in distinct contrast to the awesome production of the winter games, was the dullest such event I'd attended in my 16 Olympiads. Later, our team skipped the closing ceremony in favor of a good restaurant meal, and reports indicated that we had made the right decision.

On the *positive* aspects of the Torino Olympiad, the playing hall was marvelous; spacious with excellent access for spectators, a good press center, and each match attended by professionally capable arbiters. Also, back in the Olympic Village there was always available a group of volunteers whose sole function was to serve the needs of the players. They were invariably cheerful and friendly.

Downtown Torino was interesting, (as was the main cemetery!), but the Olympic Village was located in a drab area.

The long tradition of 14 rounds was here cut to 13, undoubtedly to reduce expenses. Certainly the ever-increasing number of countries sending teams poses a financial problem to host countries, but are not the Olympiads, as grand as they are, worth expending every possible effort? After all, for any host country, it would probably be just a once-in-a-generation event.

There were 148 men's teams in Torino, and 106 women's. Among men, Russia was a clear favorite, despite having been beaten out for the gold medal two years before by Ukraine. This time their first board, Vladimir Kramnik, had the best performance rating of the entire Olympiad, but his teammates faltered, and Russia shockingly lost four matches and ended up in a five-way tie for sixth place!

The clear winners, by a two point margin, were the Armenians, with strong play by Aronian, Akopian, and Sargissian. Silver medalist China, seeming to gain strength with each Olympiad, had their best result ever, led by Bu Xiangzhi and Wang Yue. The USA, with Kamsky, Onischuk, Nakamura and Kaidanov scoring well, won the bronze medal on tiebreak from Israel. Hungary was fifth.

Among the women, Ukraine won handily with all team members contributing. Russia was second with the young Kosintseva sisters having the best results. China (which had won the previous four gold medals!) came with a weakened lineup which took the bronze, but a marvelous 11-2 score by 12-year-old Hou Yifan suggests they may return to the top next time. Three points back, the USA beat out Hungary, Georgia and the Netherlands by tiebreak.

Down near the cellar, the BVI were seeded 134th out of 148 teams. We finished 145th. Our first board, Craig Vantilbury, scored 6-6, I had 4-7, my worst result ever. (In 16 Olympiads my overall score is 137-79, or 63 percent.) Maurice Lettsome is steadily improving. Perhaps we'll be better in Dresden 2008.

The bare point totals belie the fierce dramatic struggles taking place on every board. Chess players know this, those many who are unfamiliar with the game could not imagine it. Let us hope they will someday learn enough to share the excitement.

The BVI Team in Torino, 2006
Above, left to right: Maurice Lettsome, Captain Mimi Hook, Bill Hook
Below, left to right: Craig Vantilbury, Simon Potter, Art Christopher

Aside from the spectacular Olympiad itself, the election for FIDE president took place, with incumbent Kirsan Ilyumzhinov vs. the well-known Bessel Kok. It was very difficult to get hard information on the procedural details of the election, so I cannot comment on that. But the clearly decisive victory for Kirsan would seem to stifle any possible discontent with the result, and Kirsan's stated intent to work together with Kok bodes well for the future.

Another important matter decided in Torino was the location of the 2010 Olympiad. Depending upon my physical condition at that future time, this may be a completely academic question for me, but I was amazed and disappointed that Siberia was chosen over beautiful Buenos Aires and three sites in Europe! Apparently Kirsan's election win carried along enough momentum to secure a venue that he clearly favored.

In September 2006 we returned to Italy; after a few days on Lake Como we arrived at our destination, the Alpine village of Arvier. It seems fitting that the last tournament to be covered here should be the World Senior Championship, an often final challenge for aging players such as myself. It was required that male participants be at least 60 years old, and women 55. 124 men showed up, including nine grandmasters, headed by the strong favorite, Victor Kortchnoi. The small women's field of 14 also had a strong favorite, Ludmila Saunina. Among these, the USA representative Esther Epstein unfortunately had to withdraw in mid-tournament because of a death in her family.

We were happy to see our friends the Wagmans from Livorno arrive. Even at 87 Stuart is still up for a challenge. Finnish GM Heikki Westerinen was there; we had played on even terms in three Olympiads. And USA acquaintance Carl Wagner was at our hotel dinner table; after some political differences we both cooled it, and then got along fine. One of the Australians was Slobodan Krstic. I had taken his photo way back in the 1970 Olympiad because (1) he had a multi-colored beard, and (2) I was intrigued because he was born in Yugoslavia, raised in Canada, lived in Australia, and somehow ended up playing for Hong Kong! So now, 36 years later, I again took his photo while we both laughed at the improbability of it all.

The Alpine landscape was beautiful, our hotel great, and for 13 days we ate like the very contented chess players that we were. The format of one round per day and a convenient time control were very suitable for old farts like us. In short, an ideal tournament.

By tradition the highest rated player is initially assigned to board number one, and would move down only when his score is surpassed by rivals. But

world-class GM Victor Kortchnoi maintained his top board position throughout the entire tournament, winning the event with a fine 9-2 score. The Czech grandmaster Vlastimil Jansa had 8½-2½, and previous winner Liuben Spassov tied for third at 8 points with IMs Vladimir Bukal and Anatoly Donchenko. Among those with American connections, Stuart Wagman and I had 6-5, and Carl Wagner 5½-5½. The strong women's favorite Ludmila Saunina won handily, 8½-2½.

Most open tournaments throughout the world are packed with ambitious young players who dream of dazzling victories which will surely come. In Arvier, we have all been tempered by a lifetime of battles, but we are still entranced by this marvelous game, and we still fight stubbornly on. Next year's World Senior will be held in Austria; I hope to make it there.

April 19, 2007

And so, the moves of the distant and more recent past having been recorded, it is time to evaluate the present position. With an 82nd birthday looming, it is obvious that I am deep, deep into the endgame. Moreover, in this biggest of all games a win, or even a draw, is unattainable. So what sort of compensation do I have for this inevitably lost position? Only this: by reconstructive analysis it is possible to determine how well (or poorly) I have played the game. If it is determined that I comported myself aboveboard and with distinction, then at least I will have the satisfaction of having done so. Is that enough? It will have to be.

I had a difficult opening, and then for some time I managed to hang on by merely responding to external stimuli; setting up a constructive plan and acting upon it was beyond my organizational capability at that time.

However, steady improvement in painting as well as chess developed an increasing self-confidence and things began to fall into place naturally. In this early middle game Mimi appeared and we enthusiastically joined forces, a situation that had no chess equivalent, but was nevertheless a very strong move!

The world brightened on all fronts, and a fine victory seemed imminent. But things are never that simple, and while my life had left behind its chaotic beginnings and become a happily joined struggle, the battle simply shifted to another plane, and a definitive triumph remained tantalizingly elusive. Things are probably meant to work out this way, that we always seek more than we have, and more than we are likely to attain. But that's fine with me. I am very happy.

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Instead of being sent off to World War II in 1943, Bill Hook ended up in hospital for 15 months with tuberculosis. While hacking coughs echoed down the corridors the 18-year-old patient learned to play chess, a discovery that would have a defining impact on his life.

Upon his release, the novice headed directly for New York's legendary chess club, Fisher's on 42nd Street. He was to spend much of his next 25 years at 'The Flea House', where a motley crowd of amateurs, hustlers and celebrities such as Marcel Duchamp, Stanley Kubrick and New York Times music critic Harold Schonberg mingled.

With a keen eye for detail Bill Hook portrays lesser gods and famous champions, including a young Bobby Fischer, whom he beat in their first four blitz encounters.

After he had built a second home on the idyllic Cooper Island in the early 1960s, 'Captain Hook' began to represent the British Virgin Islands at international team competitions. He has played in a record 16 Chess Olympiads, winning the gold medal on first board in 1980.

Drawing from a sheer bottomless well of memories, the author also describes his painting career and his adventures as a fervent gambler. His passion for photography is highlighted by a fine selection of his pictures.

'A good read, a colorful document, and an admirable life.' – from the preface by The Washington Post chess writer Lubosh Kavalek

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